

# THE SONG OF THE ROSE

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HILLIS GRANE





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# THE SONG OF THE ROSE

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*Hilda Svensson*  
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THE  
**SONG OF THE ROSE**

BY

HILLIS GRANE

*pseud.*

FROM THE SWEDISH

BY

A. W. KJELLSTRAND



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## I.

Lady Ringmor Heine sent the curtain up with a clatter and a bang, disturbing the morning quiet of the great imposing manor house, where the servants were already early astir tripping cautiously back and forth through the halls and corridors of Birgerhouse. During the night such strange dreams had visited her that now at the first peep of dawn she must rush to the window to learn if the world about her was really as weird as she had beheld it in her dreams. Last night, when she had cast a last look out upon the landscape, she had hardly been able to discern the stately poplars lining the drive, for the air was thick with mist and the darkness grew so intense that a thrill of fear shot through her, causing her to roll down the curtain with quite as much emphasis as she had now used in sending it clattering up to the top.

Thus it came about that when she had retired for the night a nameless dread filled her heart, mingled with an overmastering sense of loneliness and sadness. Well she knew that there was not another young woman in the neighborhood who had more reasons for feeling happy

and glad; and to be sure, there were times when she was as gay and happy as a lark, but at other times, and these were of growing frequency, dark, gloomy thoughts full of anguish swooped down upon her, pursuing her night and day until she was ready to despair. With ever increasing intensity she longed for some one to whom she might confide all those hidden cares that caused her such pain and torment, but where find one who would understand her, who would yield the ready sympathy for which she craved? At first she had made timid attempts to lay bare her heart to her father, Count Heine, but she soon gave this up from a vague feeling that her father was puzzling over the very same questions she was vainly trying to answer, that his heart was filled with a brooding sadness akin to her own.

Then, to be sure, there was Uno, who in a certain sense stood nearer to her even than her father—Uno, the friend of her childhood, with whom she had shared all her joys and sorrows as far back as she could remember. The young Baron Uno von Stedt, master of Mountain Oaks, had early lost his parents and had spent the years of his adolescence under the care of the Count at Birger-house, the widely known and respected Colonel Heine. As a natural consequence a spirit of *camaraderie* had been established between Ringmor and Uno, which spirit, as the years passed, developed into a deep affection and love between them. It was generally believed and accepted as a fact that these two, youth and maiden, were destined for each other and that their engagement would be announced as soon as the young baron had shown himself capable of managing his own estate. Mountain Oaks was a large estate, which should have yielded a considerable income, but Uno's father had devoted his time and

energies to nothing but his pleasures, and as a natural result the estate was heavily encumbered when, after a brief illness, his life was suddenly cut short.

On his deathbed he had exacted a solemn promise from his old friend Count Heine, that the latter should rear Uno in such a way that when his time came to die he would not need to look back upon a life of dismal and bitter failure such as the father's had been.

Count Heine of Birgerhouse was prominent in military circles. As the colonel of a regiment he was known to be a strict disciplinarian, exacting and obtaining prompt obedience in all matters great or small. The punctiliousness which marked his public life also characterized all his private acts and dealings. No wonder then, that it seemed to Uno that he was coming into a new and strange world when he was taken to Birgerhouse to live after the death of his father. At Mountain Oaks the handsome, merry boy had been the spoiled favorite of all the members of the household. This was especially true of the feminine portion of the establishment, all of whom vied with each other to lavish upon the motherless boy the love and affection which the untimely death of his own mother had denied him, thus innocently doing all in their power to spoil him. In this they were aided and abetted by the menservants, who encouraged the already too self-assertive child to recognize and yield to no will or authority but his own.

To be suddenly transplanted to the household of Count Heine was therefore a peculiarly trying experience to the imperious, headstrong child. At his new home he soon learned that carelessness as to dress, behaviour or the proper use of his time would not be countenanced, and especially that it would never do to present him-

self before the colonel without being thoroughly groomed and immaculate in dress and person. Here he was taught to be circumspect in speech and manner and to keep a proper distance between himself and the servants of the Hall, something that had never entered his mind at Mountain Oaks. His whole life was now ordered with such military precision that it seemed as though the colonel considered himself to be dealing with a young recruit whom he was putting through the setting up paces of the drill manual. To Uno the worst feature of all this was that such an inordinate value was placed upon his time at Birgerhouse. At Mountain Oaks, on the other hand, Uno had spent his waking hours utterly careless of the flight of time; there the hours had sped in an unbroken round of games and sports, of pranks and frolics, all entered into according to his own sweet will, regardless of what o'clock it was. Little did it matter to him that the dinner bell had sounded, if he was otherwise engaged, nor had he ever troubled himself to leave his comfortable bed if not so inclined, though he knew that the sun was many hours high.

But at Birgerhouse he found to his consternation that the daily routine of his life was fixed by the clock. At a certain hour of the morning he was roused from his slumbers and given to understand that he must make haste to dress in time for breakfast. When this meal was disposed of, the hours dragged their weary length interminably with periods of study and recitation until his head swam with the unwontedness of it all.

Without Ringmor this rigorous course of training would have seemed unendurable to him. She became his faithful comrade and outspoken champion from the very first day of his appearance at Birgerhouse.

"You must not be afraid of papa," she whispered to him on the evening of that first day, when he felt exhausted and totally bewildered by the thoroughness and insistence of the training to which he had had to submit. How to bow properly, when to remain silent and when to speak if he was sure that he had anything to say, these are only a few of the things that had occupied his time and attention that memorable first day.

"Papa is not so dangerous as he looks," Ringmor continued, "come, let us run up to him and climb into his lap."

She grasped him by the arm and tried to drag him forward to her father, who was sitting before the fire busy with his thoughts and his evening paper. But Uno resisted strenuously, terrified at the thought of sitting in the lap of this stern taskmaster. Far rather would he have fled ingloriously back to his beloved Mountain Oaks.

How he longed for his old home to-night! Strange to think that on many a former occasion he had eagerly left it to come to stately old Birgerhouse, which had always attracted him as a little child, for nowhere else had he been feasted upon such sweets and tidbits, such luscious fruits and berries, nowhere else was there to be found such a perfectly delightful playfellow as Ringmor. Her flowing locks of flaxen hair, her fine cut features and sky-blue eyes had made a strong appeal to his aesthetic senses. He had heard speak of angels and had seen them pictured in books and on the canvas, and he was firmly convinced that originally Ringmor must have been an angel in heaven, though for some inexplicable reason she had come to live on earth.

On the whole, he finally concluded, it was much the

better for him that Ringmor had come to live near him on earth and not in the far distant heaven. Once when Ringmor had been very kind it suddenly became clear to him that his own mother, who had gone to heaven, must have prayed God to let Ringmor come to earth as a little girl instead of remaining an angel in heaven.

He was so sure that this was the way of it that he made haste to impart his discovery to Ringmor.

"O Ringmor!" he cried, "I feel sure that when my mama went to heaven to live with all the angels she could not become real content and happy there until God had promised her to send one of his tiniest angels down to live in Birgerhouse, and do you know, you are that very angel, Ringmor!"

They were playing under the shady elms in the garden when he imparted this startling secret to her.

And in truth it did startle her! Not that she knew any more than Uno about angels and heaven and the mysteries of the spirit world, but of this one thing she was perfectly sure, that she was not an angel. Oh, no! Angels, she knew, were finer and grander than poor little she!

"Uno, Uno, how can you utter such words?" she cried in a tone of real distress. "Don't you know that angels are beautiful, snow-white creatures, who never do anything that's wicked?"

"Neither do you," he maintained sturdily, "and you are much more beautiful than the angels we see in the frescoed ceilings of our church."

Ringmor was at a loss to refute his words. He was a whole year older than she and must in consequence know a great deal more, but for once she was certain that he must be mistaken. Besides, she was afraid

that it was blasphemy for him to talk as he did. Anxiously she beat about for some way to make this clear to him.

"You *mustn't* say such things, Uno," she declared, her voice quivering with earnestness. "It's a sin, a dreadful sin, I tell you!"

Impressed but not convinced by her words, Uno held stoutly to his opinion that God had sent an angel to Birgerhouse instead of a common mortal such as himself.

"Sin," he puzzled, "what do you mean by sin? That's a thing I haven't heard of before."

"Don't you know that when you aren't good you are a sinner?" she asked in surprise.

No, he hadn't heard of that, and what was more he didn't care to try to discover what might lie beneath that new, strange term.

"At all events I'm not a sinner now," he argued, "I'm only trying to prove to you that originally you were a little angel. There can't be anything so very bad about that, I should think."

Poor Ringmor! Well she knew that Uno was sadly wrong, but as her distracted little brain refused to unravel the tangle, she must perforce give it up. But just as she had come to this conclusion she spied her father approaching. Here was the one to solve the riddle. Impulsively she ran to meet him.

"Papa, papa," she whispered, when she found herself snugly resting in his arms, "Uno says that originally I was a little angel! Do tell him, papa, that he is mistaken."

Count Heine tenderly fondled his child and patted her cheeks with a gentleness strangely at variance with the manners to be expected from the gruff old warrior that

he was. Somehow he had no fault to find with Uno's declaration, for had not Ringmor been an angel of light in his home, which without her would have seemed dark and dismal indeed? But on the other hand he was well aware of his little girl's deep sense of right and truth. Instinctively he understood that it pained her to think that Uno could be of the opinion that angels were not purer, whiter, far more beautiful than her poor self.

While the count was pondering over what answer to give, Uno interpreted his silence as an acknowledgment of the correctness of his views. This gave him courage to exclaim: "How could an angel be more perfect than Ringmor? It's impossible for her to be naughty, and even if she tries she makes a failure of it."

At these ingenuous words the count laughed outright.

"There is a difference between you and Ringmor in this respect, I will admit," he said, "but you must not think that the explanation is that Ringmor was originally an angel and you a mere mortal; the real difference between you is due to the fact that she has such an earnest desire to do what is right that it has become second nature with her to be good and kind."

Nothing more was said on this subject, but in his heart Uno still cherished the conviction to which he had arrived with regard to Ringmor. She was the only ray of sunlight in his otherwise bleak existence, bringing him, as it were, a message from that higher world where his mother dwelt in perfect bliss. To her alone he ascribed his power to endure with patient forbearance the exacting round of duties at Birgerhouse and even to find to his surprise a certain pleasure in encountering and overcoming his distaste of the Spartan rigidity of a life hitherto unknown to him.

It must not be understood, however, that Ringmor's labors were crowned with immediate and complete success. For months, nay, for years she strove to bring about that perfect understanding and trust between Uno and the colonel which characterized her own relations with her father. Step by step she paved the way for the orphaned boy to the heart and affections of the count. For it was not enough, she soon discovered, to bring Uno closer to her father: this was only the half of her labor of love; she must also prepare her father's heart to receive Uno with kindness and affection. None knew better than the count what duty required of him with respect to the son of his departed friend, and guided by this stern sense of duty untempered by the tenderer promptings of love, he sought only to make of this headstrong, wayward boy the model of orderliness and conscientiousness that he himself was. Therefore, when he appeared to fail signally in this, when at times it seemed that Uno's character was already twisted and warped beyond all hopes of redemption, then there would surely have been breakers ahead for both her father and Uno, had not the gentle but firm hand of Ringmor guided them through these periods of storm and stress into the smoother and deeper channels of mutual understanding and love.

"You must be just as good and kind to Uno as you are to me, papa," she would coax, whenever she saw the frowning brows of her father contract in a manner that boded ill for Uno. "You must love him, otherwise he will never be good."

"Love him! How can I love such an intractable young scamp?" retorted the colonel. "It's not so much love as the birch that he needs."

Whereupon Ringmor in a perfect frenzy of fear would twine her arms nervously about her father's neck, and cry: "No, no, papa! you mustn't beat him. O, you mustn't beat him!"

Time after time the count had yielded to the sweet blandishments of his daughter, and Uno had escaped the punishment he so richly merited. Gradually, however, even the count had to confess, though reluctantly, that Uno was creeping into his heart and was really making an earnest effort to live up to the high standards set for him.

But there came a day when Uno was guilty of an escapade which the count could neither condone nor pardon. Surreptitiously he had taken a small parlor rifle from the colonel's choice collection of arms and weapons, shouldering which he had betaken himself to the extensive woodlands surrounding Birgerhouse. There he had encountered a cow peacefully basking in the sunshine of an open glade. How it happened, he never could tell. A sharp report, a sudden burst of speed, and blood streaming from the injured eye of the cow, these were the outward evidences of a deed as surprising as it was unpremeditated.

Too late the repentant boy remembered that he had been strictly forbidden to touch, much less to handle any of the colonel's collection of arms. But somehow these had always lured Uno with a power that was all but irresistible. His own father, he remembered, had possessed a no mean collection of arms, and he had always been free to play sad havoc with them, as it was the invariable rule at Mountain Oaks that no firearms should be left about the premises loaded. When he had come to live at Birgerhouse, he had looked with admira-

tion upon the fine collection of arms to be seen there, and from the first it had been extremely difficult for him to refrain from touching and handling this brave array of deadly weapons so dear to a boy's heart.

"But am I not to become an officer, Uncle Heine?" he had once remonstrated. "Surely an officer must learn all about the mechanism and use of arms."

"The first duty of an officer is to learn to obey," was the colonel's incisive reply, "and you know what my express command is in this respect."

Yes, of course, he knew and had observed it to the letter year after year. Then, in an unguarded moment, during the temporary absence of the colonel the thing had happened with the sad consequences above described.

Uno did not fully realize the enormity of his deed until he saw the cow bellowing with pain set off with tossing head and tail erect and vanish from sight in the remote confines of the forest. Then the magnitude of his offense was suddenly brought home to him. What was he now to do? His first impulse was to throw away the gun and flee into the farthest depths of the forest, so far that the avenging arm of the count would never reach him. The thought of Ringmor was all that stayed him. How could he flee without a final word of farewell to the only friend he had in the world?

Hurriedly, almost furtively, he made his way through the park, and unseen he reached the room where the arms were kept. Replacing the rifle he hastened out of the room to find Ringmor. Guided by the faint and laborious tinkle of a piano he soon found her in the drawing-room busily occupied with her music lesson.

"Stop that rattle-de-bang for a moment", he commanded, "and listen to what I have to say."

Something in his tone caused her to look up with a startled expression eloquent with a foreboding of evil.

"What is it, Uno?" she whispered with bated breath and paling cheeks.

"I only want to say farewell and thank you for all you've done for me; I'm leaving Birgerhouse for good and all."

He tried to carry it off in a spirit of bravado, but there was a noticeable quaver in his voice as he uttered the last words.

"O, Uno!" she wailed.

Interrupting her lamentations he continued brusquely: "I borrowed one of Uncle Heine's guns a while ago, and while I was strolling about in the woods with it, the plaguy thing went off, wounding one of the cows. And now I'm off! Good-bye, Ringmor, good-bye!"

With a tragic air he made for the door only to be intercepted by Ringmor who kept repeating: "Uno, Uno, you mustn't leave us this way! What do you think father will say?"

"I neither know nor care what he will say," retorted Uno desperately, "I'll not stay and take a whipping, I tell you! A Baron von Stedt does not have to put up with such treatment."

All in vain were Ringmor's pleadings and tears. Obdurately he clung to his purpose to leave Birgerhouse, never to return. Bitterly he rehearsed the numerous instances when he had been humiliated by the count's treatment of him; punishment in one form or another for real or fanned offenses had been his daily lot, and every time he reminded Ringmor of some fresh indigni-

ty practiced on him, he kept repeating scornfully: "Do you think that is a proper way to treat a nobleman?"

To which all she had but one plea to make: "Uno, Uno," she cried, "you know that papa means it all for the best!"

In the midst of this sad and tragic leave-taking the count himself appeared upon the scene, having arrived at Birgerhouse sooner than he was expected.

"What's up?" he inquired, suddenly entering the drawing-room and observing the flushed faces and excited mien of the children. "You haven't been quarreling, have you?"

Uno tried desperately to beat a retreat and vanish from the scene, but Ringmor clung to his arm and endeavored just as desperately to draw him nearer her father, just as she had done on that first day of Uno's coming to Birgerhouse. Despite his struggles she succeeded in hindering his flight and even in bringing him face to face with the count.

Gasping for breath she cried: "O papa, Uno won't believe that you like him at all, but you do, don't you papa?"

Stepping up to the stubborn, refractory boy, Count Heine laid his hand gently on Uno's head saying: "Of course I think a great deal of you, my boy! You must never doubt that."

Two powers within Uno were battling for the mastery. On the one hand he longed to confess his fault and sue for pardon, and to this step the count's unwonted gentleness strongly urged him. But then again there was his own pride to be reckoned with. After all, what evil had he done? Was it not perfectly natural for him to be interested in arms; he, the son of an

officer and himself destined to become one? That he had wounded a cow was to be deplored, of course, but accidents will happen even to the best of men.

In the end pride conquered, and with a sudden access of courage he felt that he would dare to face the colonel. Should a Baron von Stedt quail before any man? In the old days at Mountain Oaks his own father had often playfully addressed him as Baron von Stedt and treated him as an equal. At Birgerhouse all this had been changed. Here his title had never been used in addressing him. As he now thought of this slight, his vanity and pride of rank flamed up and blazed until he felt himself at this moment the peer even of the count.

Standing erect and stiff before the colonel, he began to speak with a certain dignity and calm: "Uncle, as one who is to become an officer I took the liberty to borrow the small parlor rifle in your collection, and I have had the misfortune to injure one of your cows with it. I — — —"

His courage had ebbed to the vanishing point. He began to speak as a baron of the realm; he finished as a culprit boy momentarily expecting a richly earned punishment for his disobedience.

And well might the lowering brows of the colonel strike terror to a heart even more resolute than Uno's.

"Come Uno," he snapped and walked with mighty strides toward the door of his office. Just as he had reached the door and turned the knob, he faced about and said curtly: "Ringmor, you are not to come."

Uno never forgot the hour he spent with the colonel in the office. There he learned, as he had never thought to learn, what the world expected of a real aristocrat and nobleman. There the count with infinite patience

explained to him what the Fatherland, what Sweden, its king and its people, demanded by every right, human and divine, of those privileged to bear the ancient names and titles of an honored ancestry.

"A people content to rest their laurels on the stirring memories and heroic deeds of valiant ancestors without a thought of hewing their own way through obstacles however great to a higher and nobler plane of human endeavor, are doomed to a lingering but inevitable death," declared the colonel with all the solemnity of a prophet of old. "And what is true of a nation as a whole is also true of a race or an individual however ancient and noble the stock from which they spring. If the nobility of Sweden is to count for anything in the annals of history, its importance must not be measured by the grand old names of its aristocracy or by the wealth and influence inherited from long lines of ancestry; rather must it be ready to offer upon the altar of the Fatherland its best gifts of mind and heart, of loyalty and noble service. Every true nobleman, my dear Uno, must ever bear in mind that his rank and station make him a marked man, a man whose life and influence make either for all that is good, exalted and noble, or for that which is low, mean and despicable."

To Uno listening to these impassioned words, the count seemed to grow and tower until he, a shrinking, cowering child huddled up in a corner of the great arm-chair, seemed utterly weak and puny in comparison.

"I have tried to bring you up as if you were my own son, Uno," the colonel continued, "and of late it has gladdened my heart to think that you were gradually growing amenable to the rules of conduct I have laid down for you. But now my hopes for you are shattered

by this new act of disobedience and defiance. What excuse or explanation have you to offer for such conduct?"

Dismayed and speechless, Uno did not essay a word in self-defense. The enormity of his offense overwhelmed him with a sense of guilt and shame. Abject and mute he dared not lift his eyes from the floor to meet the stern gaze of the colonel.

"Have you nothing to say for yourself, my boy?" the count asked after a pause that seemed endless to Uno.

Then Uno suddenly sprang up and advanced to the count with head erect and eyes blazing with a great resolve.

"Uncle," he said firmly, "punish me as I have deserved. I have no valid excuse or explanation to make."

"So be it!" said the colonel earnestly, "but tell me, shall I punish you as a boy who has been disobedient or as a nobleman who has failed in his duty?"

"As a nobleman, sir," replied Uno promptly and resolutely.

"But that punishment will be the more severe," declared the colonel, his heart suddenly warming to the manliness displayed by Uno.

"I do not ask to be spared," the boy replied.

Nor was he. Inexorably the heavy hand of the colonel brought home to him a full realization of what it meant to choose the more severe punishment, but though the boy smarted under the severity of the chastigation, not a sound, not a whimper escaped him.

It was over at last. It would be difficult to say who had smarted the most, Uno or the colonel.

Gently, almost wistfully, the latter extended his hand to the trembling boy and asked: "All is well between us, is it not? We understand each other?"

"Yes, sir," the boy replied, bravely meeting the questioning look in the eyes of Colonel Heine.

In some inexplicable way both felt that the chasm between them had suddenly been bridged. In a flash it was revealed to Uno that the rigid rules of conduct laid down by the count were not the arbitrary dictates of a stern taskmaster but rather the wise provisions of one whom he would do well to respect and obey. As for the count, a sudden conviction had quickened within him that this headstrong boy intrusted to his care was made of better stuff than he had dared to hope.

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When Uno had reached the age of twenty-one, the colonel determined that the time had come for the young man to take possession of the old family estates at Mountain Oaks and to manage them with the assistance of an experienced steward. While it was far from easy or agreeable for Uno to leave Birgerhouse, and above all Ringmor, yet to the young, new-fledged lieutenant the prospects of an establishment of his own were not altogether displeasing. The gay and sprightly young baron was welcomed with open arms by all the best families of the neighborhood, and a host of friends soon began to frequent Mountain Oaks. Within a short time Uno von Stedt became the moving spirit among the young people of the district, and never was mirth and laughter so spontaneous, nor were games and dances so lively as when he was present to take the lead.

The old folks, who remembered how Uno's father had been the center of the life and gayety in his day, shook their heads, fearing a repetition of the reckless goings on of the former von Stedt at Mountain Oaks.

"Count Heine has kept the young man under too strict a restraint," they croaked. "He is sure to kick over the traces now that he no longer feels the bit. How it all will end is not hard to guess."

While his elders wagged their heads and predicted sad things for Uno, he serenely kept up his merry round of gayety and pleasure, for well he knew how he meant it all to end. After he had had his swing for a year or two he would triumphantly carry off from Birgerhouse the fairest of brides, whom he would enthrone as mistress of Mountain Oaks. Then there would be an end to play and a beginning of life's work in sober earnest. But as yet it was:

"On with the dance; let joy be unconfined!" An inherited predisposition to a life of pleasure, so long kept under proper restraint at Birgerhouse, now burst all bounds, and the results of years of careful training at the hands of Colonel Heine seemed all in a moment to be blotted out or at least but dimly apparent.

During all this time Uno's life was full of strange contradictions. Whenever he visited Birgerhouse he was as if transformed. The old Uno, whom the count and Ringmor knew and loved, seemed to have come back to his own, and the reckless scapegrace of yesterday had vanished from the scene. The count, it is true, realized that Uno did not take life as seriously as he had hoped, but he confidently trusted that the young colt would soon tire of his playfulness and settle down into the traces in sober earnestness. And as for Ringmor, it had not escaped her notice, made keen by loving solicitude, that Uno was from time to time paying marked attentions first to one and then to another of the girls whom she knew, but, despite appearances, she

trusted him and felt assured of his deep, unchanging love.

But of late a sense of impending trouble was creeping over her, coming from she knew not where. True, she had begun to note that her father was daily becoming more serious in mien and aspect, and that a growing dislike of Uno was manifesting itself in his intercourse with that young man; but, when she made anxious inquiries as to this, both Uno and her father had given curt and evasive answers, the count maintaining that he had nothing against Uno, who, in turn, was inclined to be equally noncommittal.

"Perhaps Uncle Heine disapproves of the number and the diversified nature of the company I keep," he had once replied to Ringmor's anxious question. "Youth is not the time to play the part of a hermit and recluse. Time enough for that when old age comes on!"

"But don't you suppose that papa understands such things better even than you? And wouldn't it be well for you to take greater interest in the management of Mountain Oaks and devote less of your time to pleasures?"

With an indulgent shrug of his shoulders Uno asked: "Ringmor, how old are you anyway?"

"Why, you know very well that I'm a year younger than you!" she replied, making big eyes at him.

"O, to be sure, so you are! I thought from the way you spoke that you were old enough to be my grandmother. Come, Ringmor, let us be young while we may; the cares and trials of life will overtake us soon enough as the years roll on. No need to hasten their advent. Ringmor, darling, how I wish that I could whisk you away from Birgerhouse and Uncle Heine for

a time and take you with me out into the great world throbbing with the joys and pleasures of life, so that you might drink deep from the fountain of youth!"

As he spoke his eyes gleamed with a luster new and strange to Ringmor. Surely, this was not the Uno whom she loved; this was some stranger who had quaffed too deep from Pleasure's brimming bowl.

"How can you utter such words?" she asked reproachfully. "You know very well that my place is right here in the dear old home, and that I could not think of leaving papa. We have always belonged to each other, we two."

"Not so, Ringmor," he protested, "not so! You have always belonged to me, and for that very reason you ought to live the life of youth and happiness with me and not bury yourself in the staid seelusion of Birgerhouse. I tell you, Ringmor, it does you no good to live on here with Uncle Heine; it's monstrous for a young person like you to think an old man's thoughts, to live an old man's life!"

"I think my own thoughts and live my own life as, no doubt, you have discovered by this time," she replied, a distinct trace of hauteur creeping into her voice and manner.

"O yes, your thoughts are your own, I suppose," he retorted with a burst of impatience, "but they all bear the stamp and label of the dreary monotony of life at Birgerhouse."

"Have you any criticism to offer on the life we lead here?" she inquired icily. Never before had she heard him speak in this way.

"My dear Ringmor," he hastened to reply, "I have nothing whatever to remark on the way Uncle Heine

sits here all the day long philosophizing on life and its vicissitudes. But I do not want your young life to be overshadowed by such gloomy speculations. Why should you shut yourself up here as an anchorite pondering on such abstract things as goodness and truth and righteousness, when you should be out in the stirring world of realities, living to the full the life that is yours?"

"But are not goodness and truth and righteousness the fulness of life?" she asked gently. "So, at least, I have always been taught to consider them."

Uno was on the point of making an impatient rejoinder, when he recalled with startling vividness that, even when they were children together, he had considered her so different from others. So instead of hasty words he smiled down at her and said tenderly: "Your words remind me of how as a boy I used to think that you were not a human being at all, but an angel sent down from heaven to comfort and cheer me. You remember it, don't you, Ringmor?"

Yes, of course, she remembered how the impetuous boy of days long passed had recurred again and again to his great discovery, that she was originally an angel from heaven. When she now recalled this, the same sudden fear that she had felt in childhood gripped her heart. Then she had felt vaguely how wrong it was for any one to say that she was as good and pure as an angel, but now it was no longer a question of vague suspicioning, now she knew with a certainty, vivid and terrible, that many of those qualities of mind and heart on which she had prided herself were at best poor and imperfect; she realized as never before that there was so much in her soul life which she would have otherwise, were she but able to order her life according to the dic-

tates of a conscience daily growing more insistent and exacting. As she viewed herself in this mirror of conscience, she began to realize the vast discrepancy between what she was and what she ought to be. Often she needs must look away from this mirror in order to summon fresh strength and courage to live at all.

But even in such moments when an overpowering sense of her own unworthiness caused her to shut her eyes to the mirrored image lest she be utterly crushed, even then she felt a deep need of seeing and knowing the magnitude of her wretched state, of sounding the depths of her own wicked heart.

She read her Bible regularly, read it, as she supposed, from force of habit, not suspecting that a deeper reason underlay her study of the sacred book. For as she read, a noble form, exalted and glorious, stood forth from the sacred page and was revealed to her with ever increasing clearness. She saw the splendor of his personality faintly reflected in the lives of men who lived ages before his appearance on earth, and as the day of his coming drew near even "the people that walked in darkness" saw a great light. When the sight of her own sinful self terrified her, when anxiety for those dear to her filled her heart, she would turn to the sacred story of him who was the perfect man. And as she read, her troubled spirit was soothed, and through the darkness in her soul gleamed the effulgence of the Son of man.

But this reading of the Bible also served to quicken her conscience to renewed activity, and a great longing, for what she scarcely knew, flooded her soul.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me!" Such were the words that had met her eyes in an old book of devotions from which

she had been reading the previous evening before retiring for the night. These words it must have been that reechoed through her soul, giving rise to a wonderful succession of beautiful dream pictures, which thrilled and awed her as she slept. She seemed to be standing by the window of her bedchamber, as she had often done, looking down upon the landscape spread out before her. With wonder she perceived that all nature seemed transfigured: the velvet smoothness of the lawn was more verdantly green, the flowers more radiantly beautiful, the maples dotting the park and the tall poplars lining the drive more resplendent in foliage than she had ever beheld them. And she herself had shared in this strange metamorphosis, for there she stood decked as a bride in myrtle wreath of dark blue-green and bridal veil of snowy whiteness. Alone, but with no feeling of loneliness, for a joy deep, rich, compelling was filling her heart and pervading her entire being.

Lingering there by the window, she seemed to be awaiting with rapt expectancy one for whom she stood clad in robe of virgin white; one, the very thought of whose coming had transformed her desolate heart to a veritable rose garden.

Soon he would appear between the trees in the distant vistas of the avenue, where the lordly poplars sough their welcome, the spreading maples tender him their grateful shade, and the flowers lay their homage of beauty and fragrance at his feet.

Surely, he would come, the bridegroom long expected, for was not she, his bride, prepared to hail his coming!

See! there he comes at last, Uno, her hero, her knight, dressed in his lieutenant's uniform, astride his favorite prancing steed and accompanied by a goodly following

of brother officers in the regiment. She can even hear the words he exchanges with his comrades, words that could be uttered only by one inspired with the ancient chivalry of the true nobleman. She had heard such words before from the lips of her father, but never had she thrilled to them as now, when she hears them from the lips of her lover.

As she listens to his words full of the ardor of youth, but at the same time breathing the very spirit of patriotic devotion, her heart overflows with a great happiness, and from her own lips pours forth a song of rejoicing: "Happy, thrice happy the land that rears such noble sons! Secure and safe we may dwell in this land, though defenseless and weak; no enemy's hand can reach us, when such true knights, courageous and bold, rise up as a bulwark to keep and to hold us free from all danger."

But as she stands awaiting his coming, her heart athrob with expectancy, the tall, manly figure of the officer fades from sight, and in his stead she sees a form which still is Uno's, though transformed in some mysterious way into an earnest, sober man of affairs, who has dedicated his life to the rehabilitating of his ancestral estate, thus rendering a service to the Fatherland no less valuable than its defense against a foreign foe. Suddenly she realized that much as she had loved the gallant young officer, that love pales before the depth of feeling which now fills her heart as she contemplates this quiet, determined man who from love of country stands ready to immolate himself, all his hopes and ambitions, upon the altar of his native land. As she gazes she perceives that the gay company about him has dwindled down to two or three, but this fact does

not depress her, for are not the few who remain true to the highest ideals of citizenship of more account than the many heedless of every call to duty?

But nearer, ever nearer he comes, and her heart beats tumultuously with mingled feelings of hope, longing and joy. She looks again, and a subtle change has taken place: the form advancing to meet her is not that of Uno; indeed, a vague uncertainty arises within her as to whether this glorious personage, though seemingly of flesh and blood, can be called by name of mortal man, for so transcendent is his dignity and bearing that he seems not of this world.

Then suddenly the truth is revealed to her. He who from all eternity was the Son of God; he who through all eternity is the Son of man, and whose benign influence it has been her delight to trace in the annals of man—he it is who stands revealed to her! She knows now that all her yearning and repining was for him, the Friend above all others. Not for love of mortal man had her soul cried out all these years; love divine alone could satisfy the inmost craving of her soul.

Gladly would she have hastened to meet him, but she finds herself unable to move from the spot; she longs to fall adoringly to his feet, but she fears to come into his presence, for such is his perfect purity, such his radiant splendor that, in comparison, her robes of snowy white, her soul of virgin purity seem utterly vile and unclean. Decked in bridal array she had been awaiting the coming of the bridegroom; now that he has come, she feels altogether unworthy to lift her eyes to him.

She saw that he was expecting her, but she was powerless to go to him; she seemed to hear him call her, but she could find no word of reply. Slowly a nameless

anguish laid hold on her; it seemed to her that she could not live if she were not permitted to prostrate herself at his feet.

But slowly he receded farther and farther into the dim distance, and as he vanished from sight all nature seemed to mourn, the flowers faded and died, the grass withered, the maples shed their leaves and the towering poplars swayed to and fro as before a rising storm. Then all was dark. . . .

She awoke with a start, her heart quaking with fear and anguish. For a while she lay reflecting on each vivid incident of her dream, then she started up and hurried to the window to make sure that what she had seen was no more than a dream.

Tall and stately she stood there in her nightdress by the window, sunk in deep reverie. Her flaxen hair hung in a long, shining braid down her back, and the pensive look in her eye lent an added attractiveness to her fresh young beauty. Her features were as yet soft and mobile as a child's, but there was depth to her eyes and her mouth bore evidence of firmness and strength of character. Indeed, the clear-cut chin and firm mouth testified to a strong resemblance between her and the stern count, her father. For with all her gentleness and tenderness inherited from her long-lost mother, she was still her father's daughter by right of the same unyielding sense of duty which characterized him. These traits, seemingly so incompatible, were now battling within her for the mastery.

Yes, she observed, before her lay the same landscape she had seen in her dream, but the festal garb, the supernatural shimmer that had appealed so strongly to her was now absent. There had been a violent snowstorm

during the night, and now the trees and bushes, the hills and meadows were all snugly bedded under a downy blanket of white.

On former occasions she had hailed the first advent of snow with the rapturous enthusiasm of a child, but to-day it served only to increase her sadness, as it reminded her that the beautiful visions she had seen were no more than a dream—a dream, it is true, of him, the Immaculate and Holy, to whom she was so irresistibly drawn, but who continued to be so unattainably distant.

“Alas! his loving face from me is shrouded,  
Though prayers ascend, my ardent gaze is clouded;  
Would I could feel his loving arms entwining  
My soul repining!”

Sadly she repeated the words of the psalm. There was something in these words akin to the pensive mood that swayed her. Too true it was, she mourned, that the loving face of her Master was shrouded from her gaze, but could she even be sure that her prayers, the earnest outpourings of her soul, would reach his heeding ears and be answered? The last two lines, she mused, expressed the cry of her soul for communion with Christ, her Lord and Saviour.

Try as she would, Ringmor could not recall more than the last two stanzas of the psalm:

“Be of good cheer! Hope, pray, nor riches reckon!  
Soon thou shalt taste and see.—E'en now friends beckon—  
How sweet He is, His arms to thee extending  
With love unending.

“Soon to that shore where surging billows slumber,  
As drooping dove, thou'l hie; no cares there cumber.  
As wearied lamb the Shepherd's arms enfold thee,  
Nor cease to hold thee!”

As she silently repeated the rhythmic measures of this psalm, which she had read and sung so often, the truth was brought home to her that for the first time in her young life these words seemed cheap and inane, that they failed to comfort her, and with a sadness unutterable she reflected that only in that other world beyond the grave would her yearning soul find a perfect and a lasting peace.

“Be of good cheer! Hope, pray, nor riches reckon!” She repeated the words again and again, but they gave her no cheer, no peace to the soul.





## II.

When the great grandfather's clock in the dining room at Birgerhouse had pealed forth its nine solemn strokes, the breakfast gong sent its summons through the manor house, immediately followed by the sound of the colonel's firm tread in the adjoining room. Punctual to the minute he opened the door and stepped in. The colonel bore the burden of his years with an easy grace. His tall, erect figure was just as elastic as in days of yore, but his hair and beard were iron gray, and the passing years had seamed and furrowed his rugged countenance.

Ringmor was already on hand to welcome him with the bright smile and cheery greeting without which there would have been something lacking to a perfect beginning of the day at Birgerhouse.

The count stooped down and kissed her on the forehead, patting her cheek caressingly.

"Good morning, my little girl," was his hearty greeting, "have you slept well?"

"I have been dreaming all night," she replied as she took her place opposite him at the breakfast table.

There they indulged in the usual small talk of the table, which the count at last interrupted by turning to Ringmor and asking abruptly: "How would you like a ride this morning? I am going out to test the sleighing."

"Are we going to Mountain Oaks?" she inquired, her face lighting up. Recalling her dream of the night, she suddenly felt a great desire to meet Uno and to hear him speak. After all, why should she look with longing eyes for the unattainable, when there was so much near at hand for her to have and to hold?

"Yes, yes, my pet," the count answered playfully, "we will visit Uno before we return, but first I had planned to make a call at the deanery. I can't say that I am much in sympathy with the dean, but it is right and proper that we should keep up our acquaintance with the pastor and spiritual head of the parish."

\* \* \*

"Father, father, the count's sleigh is coming down the road," panted the dean's wife, a large, corpulent person, thrusting her head in at the door of her husband's study.

Dean Linder was so immersed in his studies that he did not hear, or at least pretended not to hear his wife's exciting news. Little did he care who came or went at the deanery; he lived in his own world of letters and had little or no contact with the outside world. It was his greatest pride that he was known throughout the land as one of its most distinguished Hebrew scholars, and he counted that time wasted which he could not devote to his favorite study.

"Father, don't you hear what I am telling you? Count Heine is coming," cried Mrs. Linder again, bold-

ly entering the room, though the dean had once for all made her to understand that here in this sanctum he wished to be left entirely undisturbed.

Though he must have been aware of her presence in the room—for small as it was, her great bulk completely filled it—and though he must have heard her eager announcement, Dean Linder made no sign of having either seen or heard. He would punish his wife by trying her patience, and at the same time his silence would make plain to her how unimportant he considered the news which to her, frail vessel that she was, seemed so exciting and grand.

"But listen, father," she cried rushing forward and shaking him. "Don't sit there sleeping in the middle of the day!"

Then at last smoothing down the ruffled feathers of his dignity the dean deigned to reply: "Woman, I am not asleep, neither am I blind nor deaf."

"Why don't you hurry, then?" she asked with breathless eagerness. "They will be here in a moment."

"And what of it?" was his cold reply.

But she had no more breath to spare for argument. So, hurrying over to the wardrobe, she brought out his clerical coat, which she flung rather than handed to him as she exclaimed: "Off with your dressing-gown and on with this! I must hasten out to receive our guests."

Before he had time to tell her that there was not the least need of haste, she had whisked out of the room with surprising agility and was already standing on the front porch making deep curtsies and pouring forth a flood of welcome to her distinguished guests.

If the husband took pains to show himself indifferent, not so his wife, who was keenly alive to the honor done

them by this visit of the count's. To Mrs. Linder the grandest occasion of the year had always been the annual Christmas reception at Birgerhouse, on which occasions it was the count's invariable custom to lead her to the table. Is it to be wondered at, then, that she would keep the large, dismal drawing-room well aired and with fires going throughout the long winter only for the boon of these short and infrequent visits of the count?

Secretly, Mrs. Linder thought that she had never seen a grander sight than the dashing approach of the count's sleigh drawn by a pair of well-groomed, spirited bays. The silver mounted harness gleamed in the wintry sun, for the old coachman, who held the reins, had from long years of service learned to love and respect the count's punctilious regard for neatness and orderliness. So completely had this old servant fallen in with the ways and customs of Birgerhouse that he considered all the unwritten laws and regulations of the establishment of quite as great importance as the divine law to be found in the pages of his well-thumbed Bible.

Mrs. Linder received her guests with profuse words of welcome. She took pains to repeat again and again that her humble abode was highly honored by this visit and that it afforded her the greatest pleasure and gratification to receive them.

"My husband will be here at once," she declared as she opened the door to the reception hall. Mrs. Linder never made use of the expression "my husband" except when in conversation with the count; on other occasions she would say "father" or "Peter."

"Perhaps the dean is engaged and our visit untimely," remarked the count dexterously avoiding the fluttering

arms of Mrs. Linder, who was intent upon aiding him to remove his fur coat. "In that case we will renew our visit some other time."

Mrs. Linder protested that her husband was not engaged and that it would be only a moment before he would present himself, but minutes passed, which seemed hours to his anxious wife, before her husband deigned to put in an appearance. It was clear that he wished to impress upon his visitors that Dean Peter Henrik Linder, D. D., was a man of some consequence, who would not permit himself to be hurried even by such distinguished callers as Colonel Heine of Birgerhouse and his pretty daughter. Indeed, the very fact that the count was a military man caused the dean to be all the more deliberate and dignified in his movements.

Finally he entered the room. His slim, small figure was, if possible, even more erect than that of the colonel. Though all unconscious of the fact, like all small men he was trying to make up in dignity what he lacked in stature.

"Permit me to express my deep appreciation of the honor shown me by your presence here this morning," he exclaimed, bowing over the hand of Miss Ringmor with exaggerated politeness, after which he responded frigidly to the friendly greetings of Count Heine.

"My dear dean," exclaimed the count, "I trust that we are not interrupting any important studies of yours. Should that be the case, we will gladly call again when you are more at leisure."

Mrs. Linder tried every feminine art to attract the attention of her husband. She hemmed and hawed, she coughed and fidgeted, and shot warning glances at him, but all in vain, for even if he noticed her perturbation

he was not the man to permit himself to be influenced by it.

"I will not deny," he replied, "that I was engaged in important work, more important, indeed, than even you, my dear count, can realize, but when so distinguished parishioners do me the honor of a visit, duty bids me extend to them a hearty welcome."

"Yes, indeed, it is an honor and a very great pleasure to us to welcome your lordship to our humble home," exclaimed Mrs. Linder, leaping into the breach with such celerity and skill as to rob her husband's words of their sting. It cannot be said that the venerable dean appeared very grateful to his spouse for her added words of welcome, but he said nothing, for had he not successfully maintained the importance and dignity of his own position in life as over against the colonel's?

The latter, however, was not disposed to let the matter drop. To-day, somehow, he felt in the mood to wage a war of words with the bellicose ecclesiastic. At Birger-house there was little or no opportunity for argument or dispute: to the servants his word was law, and as for Ringmor, her views were too much in accord with his own to give rise to even a semblance of argument. But the dean was in many respects the direct opposite of the colonel, and as a consequence, should hostilities open between them there was every prospect of a battle royal.

"The words of your Reverence remind me of a friend and comrade I had in the early days of my military career", remarked the colonel by way of advancing his skirmishers. "To whatever post this officer was assigned, he carried with him a trunkful of books on military topics, and whenever he had a moment of leisure he would sit and pore over them. 'It is of chief importance

to study thoroughly the arts and practices of scientific warfare,' he would say as he proceeded to cram his mind with the theories of all the past masters in military science.' Poor man! he studied until he went blind and thus became totally unfit for the profession he loved so dearly."

Quick to note the line of attack, the dean sank back into his comfortable armchair, marshaling his forces for a skillfully planned flank movement.

"That was a rather unusual story", he remarked dryly with just a trace of sarcasm in tone and look. "I had otherwise thought you gentlemen of the army were in greater danger of growing blind from too little rather than from too much study."

"Perfectly correct!" retorted the colonel, his face lighting up with the joy of battle. "It often happens that the great problems of life so obsess us that we find no time whatever to devote to books and theories. Indeed, we are sometimes compelled to emulate the example of the returned exiles of Judah when rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem—we must stand with the sword in one hand and the mason's trowel in the other, in order that the work of national defense and the work of national upbuilding may both be carried forward successfully and without interruption."

The dean found it difficult to reply to this discharge of heavy artillery or even to face it, so he again executed a flank movement, fully determined that it should never be said that the colonel had silenced him..

"Do you mean to say, my dear colonel, that studies are unnecessary? Never did I think that any cultured gentleman could be blind to the great value of learning."

Shaking his head, the colonel replied with heat that

was more than half feigned: "Who dares maintain that I am an enemy to learning? I have only told you the story of my unfortunate friend, who devoted himself so assiduously to a study of military history and the theory of war that he was rendered incapable of the practical and actual duties of his profession. That, surely, does not warrant the assumption that I am an enemy to learning, though I will admit that I sometimes wonder if we have not ample cause to fear that there is too much burning of midnight oil in the student's closet and too little preaching from the housetops, or, in other words, that the scholars of our day so bury themselves in abstruse research work that the rank and file of our people are left without care to shift for themselves."

"Without care, colonel! I wish to register my most emphatic protest against such a statement", exploded the dean. "No Swedish citizen need lack proper spiritual care! Are not his children baptized and given religious instruction; are they not in due time confirmed and admitted to the privileges of the Lord's Supper, and are not the doors of our temples flung wide Sunday after Sunday for all who wish to enter there? What more can reasonably be expected of the clergy?"

"Softly, your Reverence, let us discuss this matter calmly", replied the count so mildly that the dean became suddenly aware of his own departure from the dignified demeanor befitting so eminent a divine as himself.

"What I meant to say", the count continued, "is this: Is not life so full of real, living issues that the pastor should live it *with* the members of his flock? Should they not all feel that the man who mounts the pulpit to instruct them is one of them, that he understands their

needs, fights their battles, shares their sufferings as well as their joys, and together with them attains at last through temptations and trials to final victory?"

Count Heine spoke with a warmth and earnestness that surprised even himself, for he had not intended to allow the conversation to take such a serious turn. He knew that he was giving utterance to words seldom heard within the circles in which he moved, but he was now powerless to stay their flow. How often had he paced the floor of his office at Birgerhouse bitterly reflecting upon the sad condition of affairs within the parish! How often had he grieved to think that the man whose influence should have been felt in all the spheres of human endeavor in the community was poring over the musty volumes of hoary antiquity instead of recognizing and performing the varied duties of the life that was seething and pulsating round about him!

"What reason have you for speaking so to me, colonel?" the dean inquired after a noticeable pause. He was not so sure of himself as he had been, nor did he rightly know how to take the colonel's criticism. His chief feeling was one of resentment toward Count Heine, whose very rank and culture, so he thought, should have prevented him from speaking as he did.

"That I will tell you at once", was the colonel's ready and fearless response, "for the condition of things in the parish is such that these words should have been spoken long ago. Never was there a time when the restraints of religion were more necessary, when the influence and example of upright Christian living were more sorely needed as a light upon the way and as a salt to preserve from total corruption. Is there a way to counteract the moral laxity so noticeable on all sides, to find a cure

for the festering evil of immorality, and above all to stem the fearful tide of intemperance sweeping over the land? Surely, it is high time for us to declare war against these vices, which threaten not only to undermine the physical and economic well-being of our people, but also to reduce them to a brutish state. And in this warfare, who should be our leaders if not the clergy?"

It was fortunate for the dean that just at this juneture his wife came breezing into the room, holding aloft a steaming tea tray, and that she without ceremony interrupted the conversation, urging upon her guests the necessity of partaking of the fragrant beverage before it should grow cold. She had, however, caught the last words of the count; wherefore, as she was serving the tea to Ringmor, she took occasion to say in an injured tone: "Isn't it awful that the people of the parish should lead such bad lives? I am heartsick with fear every time duty calls my husband out among them. Who can tell to what extremes they might go in the midst of their continued earousings?"

"Never fear for me!" exclaimed the dean with marked acerbity. "The *common people* have not yet forgotten the duty they owe their pastor and spiritual adviser."

Count Heine did not deign to notice this new attack upon him, but allowed the dean the questionable privilege of having fired the last shot in their controversy. But somehow the joy of victory failed to perch upon the banners of the dean; for the words of the colonel continued to rankle in his breast, and he found it difficult to resume his studies with his former equanimity. For days and weeks after the count's visit his impassioned words caused a stir of uneasiness within the usually placid bosom of the scholarly dean.

Upon their departure from the deanery, Count Heine and his daughter proceeded on their way to Mountain Oaks.

As they came swinging up to the main entrance, Uno could be seen hurrying out to meet them. In a trice he had reached the sleigh and was unbuttoning the apron; and all the while his countenance beamed with the welcome he was vainly trying to put into words.

Finally he managed to say as he was lifting Ringmor out of the sleigh: "This is indeed a pleasure as great as it is unexpected! I only trust that Mountain Oaks has some choice treat in store for guests so dear to me as you, Ringmor, and Uncle Heine."

The young lieutenant proved a very agreeable host. He exerted himself to entertain the colonel with talk on all the leading topics of the day, but all the while Ringmor noticed with secret exultation that he was consumed with desire to engage her in a private and more intimate tête-à-tête. After dinner their opportunity came, when the colonel withdrew for his customary after-dinner nap.

There were neither as many nor as roomy apartments at Mountain Oaks as at Birgerhouse, but an air of homelike comfort prevailed there which appealed strongly to Ringmor. Uno had understood the secret of utilizing the limited means at his disposal, and as a result Ringmor was agreeably surprised to note the many evidences of good taste displayed in the furnishings of this ancient seat of a noble house.

"Do you know, Uno, I feel so thoroughly at home here that I almost dread the thought of returning to the huge, dismal halls of Birgerhouse," declared Ringmor as she dropped down upon an ottoman in the cozy little parlor after a tour of inspection through the house. "I have

often wondered if people in *small* homes do not as a rule live the happiest lives."

"O, this is well enough, I suppose," he replied, "but I would much rather invite you to become mistress of a stately Birgerhouse than of this unpretentious Mountain Oaks."

"O Uno!" she exclaimed, "don't say that. You know how happy I am to think that I am to share this comfortable little home with you. The very thought that I will have a free hand, some day, in ordering all the details for our comfort here makes me indescribably happy. For, of course, we will not have such a host of servants as father maintains at Birgerhouse; that would be extravagant and unnecessary."

Uno did not manifest the pleasure and enthusiasm that she had expected. On the contrary he grasped her hand, small and soft as a child's, and holding it up for her inspection he said: "Do you think that this was ever intended for such work as you are now planning? Don't you see that the fact that you are to marry an impecunious lieutenant will not make you other than you are, a woman bred to the ease and refinements of life? Naturally we will have so many servants that there will be no need for you to trouble your pretty little head about household cares."

Poor Ringmor! Though she tried bravely to conceal it, she was heartsick and disconsolate. She had longed so much to do something for the one she loved, and she had been looking forward joyfully to the time when she as mistress of Mountain Oaks would be of more real service to others than she had ever been at Birgerhouse. Many a time had she prayed her father to dismiss some of the servants and permit her to assume some of the

duties of home management, but always the answer had been that such an arrangement was out of the question. The position and reputation of the count demanded that there should be an elaborate establishment and a swarm of servants to maintain the almost feudal state of this proud old aristocrat. And now Ringmor wondered with a pang of bitterness if this state of affairs was to continue also at Mountain Oaks after she had been installed as mistress there.

Coming to a sudden resolve she said with a firmness that surprised even Uno, accustomed as he was through years of experience to the adamantine quality of her character: “No, Uno, I will never acquiesce to such an arrangement. If I have submitted meekly all these years to be a mere figurehead in my childhood’s home, I will under no circumstances put up with it when I come to live with you at Mountain Oaks. O Uno, *do* try to realize what it will mean to you to have one who loves you dearly doing all in her power to make this place a very home for you instead of intrusting this task to the whim of hired servants.”

“I must confess that I have never thought of it in that light,” said Uno playfully, trying to pass the whole matter off as a jest, “and without having reflected seriously on the subject, I have always thought that it would be ever so much more pleasant for a husband to feel that his wife is his comrade and boon companion rather than to have her pottering about amongst the dishes and saucepans of the kitchen.”

Somehow Ringmor did not take kindly to the trend of their conversation, so seized with a happy thought she exclaimed joyously: “But don’t you see that we cannot afford to keep so many servants. Your lieutenant’s pay

is comparatively small, and father says that Mountain Oaks will not for years to come yield us a sufficient income to live upon."

Uno bit his lip in vexation, for he recognized that her words were all too true. But on the other hand, he reflected, they would be able to live in grand style if he could only lay hands on the maternal inheritance of Ringmor, which he knew to be considerable. But how to broach this delicate subject—of late he had spent many a sleepless night in anxious consideration of this question. Try as he would to take a hopeful view of his financial condition, the bald fact stared him in the face that Ringmor's inheritance was all that stood between himself and ruin. No longer could he shut his eyes to the desperate situation in which he found himself. He was beginning to realize that the life he was leading was draining to their utmost limit the slender resources at his command, and to cap the climax of his woes his steward was continually demanding funds for the most pressing needs of his heavily involved patrimony. To meet these demands he, Baron von Stedt, had for some time been borrowing right and left without any clear conception of how he was to meet his increasingly pressing obligations.

The conviction was suddenly brought home to him that he must speak to her seriously about the desperate state of his affairs—perhaps she could be prevailed upon to come to the rescue.

"Of course I know that I am only a poor lieutenant," he said, "but can't you see that it is just because of my connection with your family at Birgerhouse that I have been drawn into the whirl of society hereabouts? And once in, I must play my part, not only now, but also

after we are married. My dear Ringmor, you can't imagine the straits I'm put to in maintaining my position as Baron von Stedt and your affianced husband, when it is only too true, as you say, that I am but a young lieutenant, desperately trying to live upon the slenderest of incomes."

For a moment Ringmor was too astonished to reply. When she did find words, she said with naive simplicity: "But you must remember, Uno, that my position is also a difficult one, drawn as I am between love for you and duty to my father. Of this, however, I can assure you, that neither my father nor myself require that you should be continually dancing attendance upon the gay society in our neighborhood. On the contrary, it would please us both if you would withdraw entirely from the gay set."

It was now Uno's turn to be astonished, and more—to be thoroughly displeased.

"You don't understand this thing at all, Ringmor," he explained, "nor does Uncle Heine. It will never in the world do for me to live as a recluse. I must associate with persons of position and influence, must, in fact, be both heard and seen, if I am to hope for any preferment in my chosen calling. You would not, I am sure, have me remain a simple lieutenant all my days."

"Of course not," she replied hesitatingly, not so sure of herself as she would like to be. "It makes me happy to know that you are so ambitious, but, tell me, is it absolutely necessary for you to mingle as you do with the gay set in order to further your ambition for preferment? Really, I can't understand how your success as an officer in the king's service can depend on such a life."

The absurdity of Ringmor's words proved too much for Uno. He started up and began to pace the floor with mighty strides. Finally he took his stand squarely before her, a sarcastic smile, which he vainly tried to hide, playing about his lips. It was so easy for him to view the most serious things in a ludicrous light.

"Ringmor," he laughed, "if you were only half as sensible as you are, you would be a prodigy of wisdom."

Ringmor tried desperately to respond to his raillery, but the smile she gave him had more of pathos than of mirth. She felt intuitively that Uno had not been frank with her, that there was something beneath his raillery which jarred on her, and as she anxiously sought to discover what it might be she suddenly recalled her dream of the night before. In a flash the truth, stark and vivid, stood revealed to her.

"What are you thinking of?" asked Uno, who had remained standing before her, startled in spite of himself by the new, strange light in her eyes.

A sudden blush of confusion mantled her face. How could she open her heart to him, how could she reveal to him the wonderful dream she had had?

"Oh, I just happened to think of a dream I had last night," she replied evasively. Plainly, she wished him to understand that she had no desire to discuss the matter further.

But Uno's curiosity was aroused, and he was not inclined to dismiss lightly this dream of Ringmor's, especially as he could not help noticing her manifest reluctance to take him into her confidence.

"Come now, Ringmor, tell me all about it," he said with an air of firmness, as he again seated himself at her side. "Really, you know, it is my right to share

with you anything that is troubling you, even if it is nothing but a dream."

Ringmor did not know how to reply. There had been a time, she remembered sadly, when Uno had shared all her joys and sorrows, when he had been her most trusted confidant, but that time now seemed past beyond recall. Without just knowing how it had come about, she now recognized not only that her point of view of the external world was strangely altered, but also that their inner soul-lives, Uno's and hers, were drifting farther and farther apart. But she would not for the world broach this matter to him, for, now as always, there was nothing she dreaded so much as to cause him disappointment or sorrow; therefore, she mused, she would try as best she could to tell him of her dream.

"Well, then, I suppose I must tell you of my dream," she began hesitatingly, but I feel that I can't relate it to you as I really saw it. "I dreamed so beautifully that I was standing by my window at home, arrayed as a bride and waiting for you."

"Well, well," cried Uno, "that *was* a beautiful dream! But, surely, that is not all. Tell me the rest of it."

Covering her face with her hands to hide her confusion and her blushes, she pleaded: "Uno, dear Uno, don't ask me to tell you any more! After all, it was only a dream."

"But I insist on hearing your dream," he urged, his interest raised to a high pitch by Ringmor's ill-concealed embarrassment.

Realizing that there was nothing for it but to meet the wishes of her lover, Ringmor put forth a supreme effort at composure, her one desire being to have it done and over with as soon as possible.

"At a distance I saw you coming," she continued hurriedly. "When I first noticed you, you were in the uniform of your regiment and accompanied by a large following of your fellow officers gaily approaching on prancing steeds, but the longer I looked, the fewer became your following and you yourself were no longer the gay officer, but a staid and sober man of affairs. Then, suddenly, I realized that it was not you but another who was coming to meet me."—

She paused as if to collect herself for the ordeal before her, while Uno started violently, a quick, darting pain piercing his heart. Never in all his life had the thought occurred to him that Ringmor would ever be decked as a bride for the coming of anyone but himself—his Ringmor, the very personification of constancy and loving fidelity! But at this moment the awful possibility, nay probability of such an event filled his soul with a fear, an anguish hitherto unknown to his care-free nature.

"Who was he? Quick! name him," hissed Uno grasping Ringmor's arm in a vice-like grip.

A great, overpowering hatred of this unknown man welled up in his heart. How dared he occupy even a dream thought of Ringmor—the Ringmor who had always belonged to him and to none other in the wide world!

But while his feelings were seething and boiling over with jealous rage, Ringmor seemed as if transfigured. All her former agitation had vanished. An ecstasy that was not of this world filled her soul.

"Uno," she whispered, "he who came to me in my dream was not a mortal being, he was the Christ, the God incarnate!"

With a sudden revulsion of feeling Uno dropped Ringmor's arm. No other man then, he reflected with a sense of relief, had occupied the dream thoughts of her whom he loved. But his serenity was quickly ruffled by another disturbing thought. Had he who was intruding himself upon the thoughts and affections of Ringmor been a mere man, Uno would know how to meet and overcome such rivalry; so sure was he of his power over her and of her fidelity to him. But this strange being, who was more than man, whom Ringmor had seen in her dream—perhaps it would not be so easy, after all, to erase his image from her heart. From past experiences he knew that there were many nooks and crannies in her nature which he had not yet explored.

"What a queer dream!" he exclaimed impatiently. For the life of me I can't understand how you can give it a sober thought."

Just at this juncture there was a knock at the door, and a young girl appeared to announce that the coffee was ready to be served. Evidently she was one of the servants of the establishment, but something about her created an unfavorable impression on Ringmor, who was accustomed to deportment quite different on the part of the servants at Birgerhouse.

"Who was that, Uno?" she inquired, glad of an opportunity to turn their conversation into other channels.

"Her name is Edith," was his rather curt reply. "She is the daughter of my housekeeper."

"Is she one of your servants?"

"No, the girl is here on a visit to her mother," he replied with a shrug of the shoulder, "and she occasionally helps about the house."

"I didn't like her appearance," said Ringmor, more to herself than to Uno, "but I can't account for the unfavorable impression she made on me."

Out in the kitchen, in the meantime, Edith was stirring herself with much unnecessary fuss and clatter. She was a tall, active girl, whose regular features and lithe, well-molded form bore evidence of unlimited vitality and energy, and it could be plainly seen that she was not unconscious of her physical charms.

"Mother," she called in a high-pitched voice, "who is that sallow, pinched-nosed miss visiting at the house to-day? I found her and our gallant baron billing and cooing in the parlor."

"Well, what if you did?" remarked the housekeeper, a small, timid woman. "Miss Heine is the baron's betrothed. Haven't I been telling you all this time that he is engaged, even if he does not wear a ring?"

Edith laughed a loud, mirthless laugh and then replied scornfully: "Is that his sweetheart? I would never have believed that so handsome and merry a gentleman as our baron would take up with a funny little thing like that."

To this her mother made no reply. Silently she continued to potter about at her duties, but in her heart a nameless fear for her child was vaguely taking shape.

"When do you go to your new place, my child?" she asked, breaking a long silence.

"O, there's no hurry," Edith replied with a toss of the head. "I find myself very comfortable here."

Again there was a long silence. But it was evident that the pale little mother was sad and troubled. In her heart she knew how much was at stake: her daughter's honor, and the happiness of an impulsive youth.

and a misguided maiden. The thought made her strong and nerved her to quick and determined action.

"You must not remain here any longer, my child!" The words were spoken with a power and resolution that surprised even herself.

Edith's first response was a shrill laugh of scorn, which cut her mother to the quick.

"Must not!" she exploded. "You are greatly mistaken, mother mine. Baron von Stedt says I can remain here as long as I please."

"But I, your mother, say that you *must not* remain here any longer."

There was a ring of determination in her voice. She knew that to falter now was to put all in jeopardy. Edith must be saved. Though her own life had been ruined, her daughter's must not meet a similar fate.

The young girl did not answer at once. Her mother's words had gripped her heart with a power greater than she would admit, for she had been quick to recognize what lay behind these words. Edith loved her mother and would under ordinary circumstances have obeyed her express command; but a something new and wonderful had now entered her life, a something pressing for recognition and exerting a power over her, such as she had never before experienced. Striding up to her mother, she exclaimed passionately: "O mother, I would gladly do as you wish, but I can't—can't leave this house now! And I see you know why."

An icy shiver swept over the frail form of the mother. Misfortune, dark and terrible, loomed large before her. It had ruined her own life and was now knocking at the door of her daughter. No, a thousand times, no! Her daughter must be saved! But how, how?

"You must flee, my little girl! You must, you must!" she cried in anguish. "You will make yourself unhappy, if you stay—yourself and him!"

Taking Edith's hands between her own, the mother sought to lead her child into paths that she herself had been unable to tread when put to the fiery test of youthful passion.

The mother's emotion influenced Edith strongly. Perhaps, after all, it were better for her to flee! But no sooner had the thought taken shape, than she dismissed it as impossible, as a crime against herself. What evil had she done, what evil was she contemplating? Was it a crime to love a man who had shown her so many evidences of his favor and regard?

"No, I will not flee," she replied through clenched teeth. "I love the baron and am not ashamed of it, and he thinks the world of me. Why, then, should I not remain at Mountain Oaks?"





### III.

At a late hour of the day a plainly dressed little old woman stepped timidly into the well-ordered kitchen of Birgerhouse. Casting a look full of timorous interest about the room, she requested an interview with Colonel Heine.

"Can't you wait until to-morrow?" inquired Mrs. Vinkler, the housekeeper at the manor. "The count has been out all day and is no doubt tired."

"I have come a long way to speak with him and must return to-night," replied the old woman with more of pleading in her tone than in her words.

For a moment Mrs. Vinkler hesitated, then her native goodness of heart asserted itself.

"I will go in and inquire if the count is willing to receive you," she finally said.

So it came about that the old woman soon found herself in the presence of the count in his office.

The colonel was pacing the floor as she entered, and without interrupting his walk he bade her be seated.

"Well, my friend, where do you live?" he asked in a cheery, encouraging tone.

"I'm from Mountain Oaks," she replied, lifting a pair of clear, blue eyes to him as if to note what impression the name made on him.

"So that's where you hail from, is it?" he asked pleasantly, "you've had a rather long walk, I fear."

"My name is Malin—Malin Strand," she continued, a little uncertain of how best to state her errand. "I'm Baron von Stedt's housekeeper."

"O, you are," he responded with kindly interest, sinking down into a great armchair near his office desk. "But be seated, Mrs. Strand, be seated; you must be tired after the long walk you have had."

He was so kind and gentle, this great man, that it brought tears to her eyes. By reputation Colonel Heine was known as a stern and gruff aristocrat, but, surely, this must be a mistake. She actually ventured to sit down on the very edge of a chair, a thing she had never dreamed of doing.

"Come, tell me what you wanted to see me about," continued the count encouragingly.

But Mrs. Strand was finding it very difficult to state her errand. On her way over she had thought it all out to her entire satisfaction, but now both words and courage failed her. Try as she would, she could not find the proper words to break the tragic nature of her errand to this grand old gentleman.

"O, I am so unhappy, so fearfully unhappy!" she moaned, the words wrung from her heart by a mother's loving solicitude for her child. "I can't stand by and see it happen; it is breaking my heart!"

"So, so, Mrs. Strand! Tell me what it is. Perhaps I can help you," said the colonel soothingly.

At these words the little woman's sobs abated some-

what; she fumbled in her pocket and finally brought forth a neatly folded handkerchief with which she proceeded to wipe her eyes. It was necessary, she reflected, to be calm and collected for her child's sake. For if her daughter was to be saved, the man who sat before her was the only one to work the miracle.

"Yes, your lordship can help me," she cried, directing her blue, tear-drenched eyes pleadingly toward the count. "I am a poor, unhappy mother pleading for the rescue of her only child."

"I will do what I can for your daughter," replied Count Heine, with just a trace of coldness in his voice, as a sudden suspicion of the truth shot through his mind.

But Mrs. Strand did not notice any change in his demeanor, for she was intent on planning in her own mind all the sad details of the story she had come to tell.

"I am a poor old woman now, wrinkled and ugly," she began in a low, pathetic tone, "but there was a time when I, too, was young and when men thought me vivacious and pretty. Lovers I had a plenty, but I only laughed at them and put them off until at length one came, so strong, so masterful that my heart could not say him nay. His words were music in my ears and revealed to me the unsuspected wonders of my inner world. Yes, we would be true to each other through life, for did we not love each other with a perfect love? All was sunshine and gladness for a time, and I, poor fool, was the proudest and happiest of mortals. Then came disaster, dark and terrible, when the sunshine was blotted out and my happiness turned to anguish. In my direst need he forsook, deserted me! I hoped and prayed that I might die, but that boon was not to be

mine; and the child, his child and mine, also lived. I know now that it was my love for my child that gave me courage and strength to live, for from the first my little baby girl won for herself the love which he had spurned." — —

Her voice had trailed off into silence, and she sat staring at the carpet, sunk in deep reverie. So completely was she lost in her own sad memories that she had forgotten where she was or whom she had been addressing. But suddenly she seemed to awaken from this hideous nightmare of the past, and with an effort she recalled her scattered faculties, as she remembered in whose presence she was and the errand on which she had come.

"This is the child that must be saved, your lordship," she continued with surprising vigor. "But I am helpless to save my poor little girl, for well I know the cruel power of the temptation which has assailed her. Some one, strong and influential as your lordship himself, must come to my aid, for he who has entered my daughter's life is as high and well-born as yourself."

Colonel Heine started up from his chair and began to pace the floor with quick, nervous strides, seeking to regain his wonted composure. His pride, the pride of birth and breeding, was suffering untold pangs from the startling nature of the revelation imparted to him. Was it, then, to count for naught that during all these years he had endeavored to make of Uno a high-minded, honorable man? Was the inherited bent for evil in this young scapegrace to prove stronger than the wholesome influence under which he had lived at Birgerhouse?—A sudden thought allayed his fears. Perhaps the thing was not so serious after all! Perhaps Uno had been a

little too free in bantering with this young girl, and she with the unreasoning folly of her class had been only too ready to jump at conclusions. Yes, he reflected, that must be the explanation of this unfortunate contretemps!

Greatly relieved, he seated himself beside his visitor and said in a tone calculated to soothe and allay her agitation: "Rest assured that I will do all that I can for you. But the whole matter is not so serious as you think, Mrs. Strand. Young folks are ever given to exaggerate the importance of the most trivial occurrences."

She had followed his impetuous striding to and fro with anxious mien and had felt a distinct sense of relief when he again sat down beside her; but when she realized the import of his words, she again took alarm and cried out with fear redoubled: "O, it is, it is a serious matter! Remember, your lordship, that my daughter's honor is at stake—and much, much besides!"

"I will not forget what you have said," he responded earnestly, "nor what you deem to be at stake. You may depend on me."

Mrs. Strand felt as if a great weight had suddenly been lifted from her heart. She knew intuitively that she could depend on the promise of this good and noble man.

\* \* \*

Ever since the count's visit to Mountain Oaks Uno had been ill at ease. For some reason he could not shake off the depressing effect which Ringmor's dream had produced on him. As he reviewed his own actions during the past few months, he had to admit to himself that he had lived a rather reckless life. He knew that if reports of certain escapades of his should reach Bir-

gerhouse he would have a very uncomfortable time, indeed. The count was not to be trifled with in such matters, and as for Ringmor, he knew her to be at heart just as strict and puritanic as the count, even if these sterner qualities in her were generally concealed under a gentle and loving disposition.

It was, therefore, with no little hesitancy that he determined on the day following the count's visit to return the call at once.

Ringmor received him with her usual blithe and open-hearted friendliness. It was easy to see that to her, at least, his visit was a welcome one. The count, on the other hand, received him with marked coldness. The young lieutenant knew at once that his worst fears were to be realized.

After they had conversed for a while on general topics, the count said abruptly: "I have something to say to you in private, Uno; we had better withdraw to my office."

Ringmor looked up with unfeigned astonishment, eyeing first one and then the other without obtaining any clue to the situation. Then thoroughly alarmed, she cried: "What is the matter now? Nothing unpleasant, I trust!"

"It need be neither pleasant nor unpleasant, does it, Ringmor?" replied the colonel, trying to speak in a bantering tone. "Isn't it just possible that I may have many matters of business and otherwise to discuss with Uno?"

When Ringmor saw the door close upon the two men, there flashed upon her a vivid recollection of that day long ago when Uno had without permission taken a parlor rifle from the colonel's armory. Why should this

far-off memory of childhood recur to her now? Could it be possible that a scene similar to the one on that occasion was to be enacted there in her father's office now? How she longed and yet dreaded to know the reason for this conference between her father and Uno!

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Even the colonel was thinking of the same occurrence. After he had closed the door upon himself and Uno, he turned to the latter and said with startling abruptness: "Once within this very room I asked you whether you wished to be treated as a nobleman or as a recalcitrant boy. To-day I put the same question to you again."

A quick gleam of anger shot into the young man's eyes; his pride rose in arms, and he was on the point of making a heated rejoinder when his sense of right and justice, so laboriously kindled and fostered within him by years of training at Birgerhouse, asserted itself, and the angry words which rose to his lips remained unsaid.

"What occasion have you, Uncle Heine, to address me in this manner?" he asked after a moment's hesitation. Clearly, he wished to temporize, until he could discover how much the colonel knew of his private affairs.

"That question you must answer for yourself, if you insist upon being treated as a nobleman," the count replied sternly. "A nobleman may err, but he suffers from it; nor does he rest content until he has acknowledged his error and made amends. As a boy, you chose this manly course; are you to fall short of it now that you are a man?"

It gladdened the heart of the old count to note that

he had not yet lost his hold on this young man. Uno might be led and swayed by others and under their influence be guilty of serious indiscretions, but the count felt that at heart he was the same frank if rather impulsive youth as in the old days at Birgerhouse. And as for Uno, all that was best in him responded strongly to this appeal of the colonel.

"Well, Uncle Heine," he said not without a certain dignity of bearing, "I must confess that I have contracted debts, in fact considerable debts. As you know, my pay as an officer is miserably small, and the income from Mountain Oaks amounts to practically nothing, and so I have been compelled to borrow right and left from my friends."

To Uno's surprise the colonel took it rather coolly. He must have had an inkling of this before.

"Tell me what the sums are," commanded the count, and Uno proceeded to make a clean breast of his financial difficulties. When he had finished, there was a long list of creditors to whom he owed larger or smaller sums, the whole totaling to an amount that fairly staggered him. How trying this ordeal was to him can be more readily imagined than described; but though he winced, he met the issue squarely, for the count's stern sense of honor so reacted on him that he made no effort at concealment.

"And is that all?" inquired the count, when Uno had finished his tale of woe.

The lieutenant and the colonel eyed each other searchingly.

"Yes, sir, that is all I have to say;" then after a pause: "Concerning my finances I have nothing further to add."

"And nothing as to other things that concern us both?"

Again their eyes met in open challenge, but this time Uno's shifted and fell before the piercing, soul-searching gaze of the count.

"O, Uncle Heine"—the words burst without volition from the young man's lips—"I feel that you are aware of the change that has taken place in me, since the day I left Birgerhouse, a change which I was powerless to prevent. Believe me, it is impossible to avoid taking impression from those with whom one associates. You must make allowance for all this before you judge me too harshly."

"But don't you realize, my dear boy, that it is one of the cardinal principles of a man of honor not to take impression from that which is low, mean and debasing, but rather to give impulse to that which is good and noble in life?" rejoined the count with fervor. "Can you think for a moment that all my painstaking care of you was expended only to see you drift helplessly down the stream without an earnest effort on your part to stem the tide that is drawing you down to utter ruin?"

"Yes, I admit you are right in theory, Uncle Heine," replied the young man pathetically, now completely unnerved by the solemnity of the colonel's words and demeanor, "but in nine cases out of ten the high ground you take fails to hold when put to the test of actual life. We may *wish* to stem the tide, but the current proves too strong for us, and so we drift and drift."

"But isn't it just possible, Uno, that there may be a current setting in the opposite direction and making for higher ideals and nobler aims?"

An ugly smile played about Uno's lips for a moment

before he replied: "There is such a current, I admit, but it only avails to call forth fine thoughts and good resolutions; it is never strong enough to check the ebbing tide of irresolution and carry forward high resolve, and so our storm-tossed barks, laden with good resolutions, continue to drift helplessly toward a lee shore. Here and there may be found those who bewail their weakness, but for the most part, men bravely smile and jeer and mock, while all the time their eyes are brimming with unshed tears, and their throats choking with suppressed sobs."

"Come, come, Uno!" exclaimed the count, "control yourself!" Your words are wild and irresponsible! I, too, have been young, and I know that a man of courage and character can stem the strongest tide of evil. It will never do to give way to such thoughts as you are voicing, or to allow one's actions to be guided by them. Such a course argues a serious lack of moral stamina, without which no man can hold up his head."

"How can you expect moral stamina in one with my inherited tendencies? Though I struggle tooth and nail against them, they are bound to get the upper hand of me. There is no help for it!"

Uno's tone was hopeless and contained more than a trace of self-pity. No one, who knew the light-hearted Lieutenant von Stedt, would have believed him capable of such despairing words. Nor did they fail of their effect upon the count. His stern face grew milder, and when he spoke his words were those of an anxious father addressing a wayward son: "Don't give way to such thoughts, my boy! I know that you are handicapped by certain inherited moral weaknesses, but even the most pronounced of these may be overcome by a

determined and continued effort of the will. You are young yet, my boy, and have much to learn of life. Be guided, therefore, by the words of one who has had many and varied experiences during the course of a long and eventful life."

In this vein the colonel continued for some time to draw from the rich storehouse of his experience, until Uno's feelings began to kindle at his words, his will power, so long dormant, began to assert itself, and a determination to play a man's part in the surging life about him emerged from the chaos of irresolution and despair. No obstacle was insurmountable to him who honestly aspired; all things were possible to him who willed to struggle and achieve. Such was the drift of the colonel's earnest words.

"You must never forget what you owe to your country," concluded the colonel solemnly, and as a man of honor you have the additional duty to consider the welfare and happiness of Ringmor."

Something in the colonel's tone led Uno to believe that the last words were laden with a special significance.

"I have never for a moment ceased to remember what I owe to Ringmor," he replied with emphasis. "In my heart I have always been true and faithful to her."

"In your heart, perhaps," admitted the colonel, "but if there are circumstances and acts in your life at variance with your professed fidelity of the heart, no great dependence can be placed upon the latter," retorted the colonel sharply.

"I must demand an explanation of those words," said Uno tensely, suddenly grown pale and rigid with suppressed feeling.

"No explanation is necessary," replied the count. "Your own conscience tells you that your debts are the least of your lapses from the course of conduct befitting an officer and a gentleman."

All the pride within him cried out for power to refute this damning charge, but an awakened conscience stood inexorably in the way. Whatever the cost, he realized that nothing but the truth, however bald and sordid, would avail him now.

"Uncle Heine," he cried with parched lips and throat strangely constricted, "to my shame I must admit the charge. In thought and deed I have proved faithless to Ringmor over and over again. I have thoughtlessly dallied with the feelings and passions of other women and allowed them to dally with mine. But of this I want you to rest assured: I have always stopped short of any overt act of disloyalty to Ringmor."

"Always, Uno?" questioned the count, piercing him with an eagle look.

"Always, Uncle Heine!" replied Uno firmly, looking him steadily in the eye.

"I believe you, Uno," declared the count, a look of intense relief replacing the set expression in his face. "But I must warn you, my boy, that you have been very near to making the life of a young girl unhappy for all time. And now I demand of you that you cease dallying and begin to act the part of a nobleman; I insist that you put a stop to all this gossip of your reckless doings continually being reported to me, and as an earnest of your good intentions I order you to dismiss from Mountain Oaks the young girl I saw there when I visited you yesterday."

"I will do as you say," replied Uno in a low and

steady voice. "I will do my best to win the good will and approbation of yourself—and Ringmor."

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Uno remained at Birgerhouse the whole day. The colonel had vanished from the scene, being busily engaged in his office, and the two young people, it must be said, did not greatly feel the loss of his presence. Their relations to each other were to-day more cordial and intimate than for some time past. Ringmor felt that the true Uno had come back to her—the Uno whom she had always known and loved, but whom she of late had sadly missed. And as for Uno, he thought Ringmor gentler and more loving than ever before. If the colonel had roused Uno to a keener sense of his duty, the altogether unselfish love, the perfect trust of Ringmor, had made the narrow path of duty seem not only proper but wholly desirable and beautiful, much to the wonderment and surprise of the pleasure-loving young lieutenant.

The hour was late when Uno's sleigh drew up before the main entrance to Mountain Oaks. Little did he dream that his new-formed purpose was to be put to the test that same evening. But as his spirited roan was with difficulty brought to a stop, he saw a graceful figure come hurrying down the steps. Despite the darkness, he knew it to be Edith; so to prove the genuineness of his new resolve, he tore up the apron and got out of the sleigh without waiting for her who was eagerly hastening to his assistance.

"It isn't at all necessary for you to sit up and wait for me, when I come home so late as this," he remarked coldly, as he surrendered the horse to the waiting groom. "I can manage very well without your aid."

With hasty strides he hurried up the steps, feeling that the young girl was regarding him in dumb amazement. Perhaps he had been unnecessarily curt in refusing her services. He turned in the doorway and called out a "good night" to her, but there was no response.

Slowly Edith followed him into the silent house. She was beside herself with rage and injured pride. His treatment had opened a bleeding wound from which it would be hard for her to recover. All in a flash she saw the wide, impassable chasm between herself, a child of the people, and Uno, a proud baron of the realm. She could not forget that he would never dream of treating a woman of his own class as he had treated her.

Her decision quickly formed, she hastened into the little bare chamber where her mother lay sleeping.

"Mother!" she cried, shaking the sleeper urgently into startled wakefulness, "listen to me, mother!"

"What's the matter, child, what *is* the matter?" anxiously inquired Mrs. Strand, fearing that the worst had happened.

"I'm leaving at once, mother," replied the daughter in a harsh, steely tone. "I will not remain another night under this roof."

"But what has happened?" repeated the mother. "O Edith, tell me all!"

"Nothing has happened," retorted Edith, icily, "you need have no fears for me. I'm going to leave, that's all. O, how I hate and detest the man—and her!"

"Try to calm yourself, my child!" urged the mother soothingly. You know the old proverb: 'Birds of a feather flock together;' you know that the baron and

Miss Heine are engaged to be married, and that they have been friends from childhood."

"Birds of a feather! Mother, you have said it! Can you think for a moment that our splendid baron and this pale, insipid girl are birds of a feather? Never in the world will I believe it! In spite of the gulf between us, I am a more fitting mate for this young hawk than yonder cooing dove!"

Notwithstanding all her mother could do or say, Edith's anger continued to flame high, but it was now directed solely against Ringmor.

"As soon as it is day, I will leave this place forever," she declared at last. "I will not again be treated as I was this evening."





#### IV.

The next morning Edith was no longer to be found at Mountain Oaks. It had been her regular custom to bring in the breakfast tray with its steaming coffee and rolls, with which the baron was wont to regale himself luxuriously before emerging from his bedchamber, but this morning Mrs. Strand herself performed this service. She seemed more frail and bent than usual; the exciting experiences of the past night had swept over her as a devastating storm.

"I wish to thank your lordship for your kindness to my daughter, who has been visiting with me for some time," remarked Mrs. Strand, making a deep curtsy to her young master. "She has left to-day for her new place."

"O, so she has left, has she?" replied the baron with assumed indifference, and trying to hide the positive relief he felt at the unexpected news. "I suppose you must feel rather lonesome without her, my dear Mrs. Strand?"

"I have only to thank you for all your kindness to

me," she replied, evading the question. "Thanks to your lordship, I could never hope to be more comfortably situated, poor, decrepit old woman that I am."

"I am glad to hear that you are comfortable and content here at Mountain Oaks," rejoined the baron cordially, as he sat sipping his coffee with an air of one who is satisfied with himself and all the world. Secretly he prided himself on having made a good beginning in the new mode of life he was to lead. His next step, he reflected, must be to inform his steward of his purpose to assume the management of the estate himself, as soon as he should have mastered the various details.

So the steward, Mr. Skoglund, was summoned to the office. He was a tall, capable looking man, and seemingly not unconscious of his own worth. He had no very exalted opinion of noblemen as a class; in fact, he knew of but one such within the radius of many miles, who amounted to anything, and that was Count Heine of Birgerhouse. All the other landed proprietors, government officials and military officers of the district he despised with all his heart. And as for the slender, pleasure loving Baron von Stedt, the steward had long since set him down, not as a man, but as a thoughtless boy.

"I wish to speak with you about a matter, Mr. Skoglund," began Uno, briskly, as soon as the steward had entered the office. "Won't you sit down while we talk it over?"

The steward selected a chair with great deliberation, but looked meaningfully at the clock as he took his seat.

Somewhat frightened at his own temerity, the young master of Mountain Oaks continued hesitatingly: "Perhaps you have other matters to attend to? If so" — —

"Oh, by no means," interrupted the steward. "If you have anything of importance to tell me, sir, I will take time to listen to you. Otherwise" —

He did not complete the sentence; nor was it necessary. He had given the baron to understand who was the real master at Mountain Oaks.

Nettled by this cool assumption of authority, Uno replied with forced calm: "Yes, the matter is of some importance to us both. I was going to inform you that I have decided to take over the management of Mountain Oaks myself. I have come to the conclusion that the estate can hardly bear the additional expense of a steward."

The words were said to the intense relief of the young master; but he was yet to learn that a matter of so great importance could not be disposed of so easily.

"If that's your determination, I am ready to resign at a moment's notice," replied the steward, wholly unmoved by the startling announcement.

Mr. Skoglund felt himself master of the situation. He thrust his hands deep into his pockets and sat tilting his chair perilously, his eyes all the time regarding the young man intently, as a cat which already feels the mouse under its claws.

"Oh, not at once, nor for some time!" exclaimed Uno, in his eagerness forgetting the dignity of his position. "I would not as yet be able to manage alone. What I meant to say was that I am planning to devote more of my time to the management, so that after a while I might be able to get along with only a foreman to superintend the farming."

"Such a foreman might prove more expensive to the

estate than a steward, replied Mr. Skoglund with a smile of superiority.

"Certainly not!" declared the baron, for once sure of his footing. For could he not cite so great an authority as Colonel Heine of Birgerhouse to bear him out in this?

Letting his chair down on all fours, the steward snatched up from the desk before him a long ruler with which he beat the air vigorously, as if he were smiting some unseen enemy hip and thigh, while he vociferated: "I know very well that you may get a mere foreman for less pay, but then, what does he know? If he hasn't a capable manager to direct him, everything will soon be at sixes and sevens. I tell you it will never do on an estate as run down as this is! That's why I said a foreman would prove more expensive than a steward."

To Uno, who was by this time perfectly at sea as to what to believe, all this sounded very plausible. It would be extremely annoying, he reflected, to dismiss an efficient steward only to be saddled with a foreman who knew nothing whatever of the management of a large estate.

Realizing that he must temporize, if he would save the situation, the distracted young baron said deprecatingly: "I had planned on retaining your services for some time to come, so we will drop the matter for the present, Mr. Skoglund. In the meantime I will endeavor to learn the art of husbandry under your capable instruction."

The steward declared that it would be a pleasure to him to initiate his young master into the secrets of efficient farm management. And to Uno's secret discomfort he proved as good as his word. In season and

out of season he was continually dinning into Uno's ears all the distracting details of crops, pasture lands and dairy, besides pestering him with accounts that never would balance. And to cap the climax, Mr. Skoglund would come to him for direction and advice as to things so multifarious and unheard of that Uno had never even dreamed of their existence. All this was calculated to bring to light the total ignorance of the master, and to foster in him an exaggerated respect for the skill and proficiency of the steward.

Now for some inexplicable reason it always happened that the steward presented himself with some matter requiring much time and thought just when Uno was on the point of mounting his favorite saddle horse, or when he was entertaining company at home.

At first the steward would punctiliously beg his young master's pardon for troubling him, but when the baron with a brave show of cheerfulness would declare "duty before pleasure," the steward gradually fell into the habit of prefacing his long and tedious reports by quoting these words.

On the whole, Mr. Skoglund was proving himself a past master in the art of thoroughly tiring and disgusting Uno with the intricate affairs of the estate. And when he noticed that the baron was making an heroic effort to master the details of farm management, the wily steward hit upon a more effective means of subduing the ambitious young man. He began to persecute him with questions as to ways and means of meeting the increasingly pressing financial obligations. Where were they to find money to pay taxes long due, the wages in arrears, the bills continually piling up, etc.?

Baron von Stedt was at his wit's end, and as helpless as a child concerning money affairs. He knew that these obligations must be met, but how?—that was beyond him.

"There must surely be something which we can turn into money?" he cried one day, when the steward was pressing him to the limit of his endurance.

"And what might that be?" questioned the steward unrelentingly. "So far as I know Mountain Oaks has an oversupply of two commodities only—rocks and debts, and there is no market for either."

"But how in the world have you managed to supply the necessary funds in the past?" he cried in desperation.

"That's easily explained," replied the steward calmly. "When funds were needed, I supplied them from my own means without troubling you in the matter. And when opportunity offered, I would reimburse myself, as you can readily discover by examining the accounts."

The upshot of it all was that the baron bit by bit lost his grip on affairs and with it all interest in the management of the estate; and before long things were drifting on as hopelessly and helplessly as ever. Mr. Skoglund was again at the helm, an ugly smile playing about his mouth. It would go hard with him, if he did not manage before long to gain possession of stock and block, and claim Mountain Oaks as his own.

During all this time Uno had taken little or no part in the doings of society. He had made frequent visits to Birgerhouse, it is true; but as for the rest, he had remained strictly at home.

But one day he was visited by a brother officer in the regiment, a Captain Hall.

"Uno, you confirmed old hermit," shouted the visitor gayly, "I have found you out at last! And now I have a proposal to make to you. There is to be a grand ball at the provincial capital in a few days in honor of the new governor and his lady. It promises to be a swell affair, and I propose that you and I grace it with our presence."

Uno's eyes lit up with sudden interest. It would have been strange, indeed, if such a proposal had not appealed to him strongly.

"I wonder if Count Heine is planning to attend?" he asked eagerly.

"No, he is not; he told me so yesterday," replied Captain Hall. "But what has that to do with us? You'll accompany me, of course?"

"I'd like to, I'm sure!" replied Uno regretfully, "but I fear I must forego the pleasure."

"And why, if I may ask? Come now, no nonsense! You know there is no earthly reason why you should stay at home."

There were several very good reasons which might have served him as excuses for staying at home, but all that he chose to say was: "I can't go, Victor, it would cost too much, and just at present I am short of funds."

"Funds, Uno? A mere bagatelle! Draw on me for any amount you need. So, that's settled, and we will make the trip together."

Before Uno could utter a word of remonstrance, the steward's head appeared at the door, which he had opened without the formality of a knock.

"I should like to consult you about a matter," he began, striding briskly and confidently into the room.

Captain Hall looked the astonishment he did not ven-

ture to express, while Uno's face flushed with irritation and chagrin. He felt humiliated to think that he had allowed this fellow, steward as he was, to take such liberties with him. The story was too good to keep, and the captain would, of course, tell it to the officers of the mess with the result that he would be laughed at as a puling youngster without respect or authority even in his own home.

"Just now it's quite impossible, my dear Skoglund. As you see, I'm engaged," replied the lieutenant with as much dignity as he could command.

"Very well, sir," snapped the steward, eyeing the two gentlemen with an air of irritating condescension. Then he turned on his heel and stalked out of the room.

"What an unpleasant fellow that was!" exclaimed Captain Hall. "How can you endure to have such a churlish steward in your service?"

"Endure!" cried Uno, his eyes snapping with anger. "Do you think I can pick and choose with my affairs in their present state? But now I have reached the limit of my endurance. Let my affairs go hang, I must have a change of air, a change of surroundings, or I will surely go crazy! Lead on, brother Victor, I'm with you for one more swing in the gay life at the capital next week!"

But when the merry captain had taken his departure, Uno's point of view gradually changed. How in the world was he to explain the contemplated journey to the inmates at Birgerhouse? What excuse could he, a penniless lieutenant, offer for going, when the wealthy Count Heine remained at home? Already he was in a mood to repent of his rash promise, when the door opened, and without ceremony the steward again appeared.

"Perhaps you will give me some of your time now? But let me tell you, Baron von Stedt, that I have neither the time nor the inclination to wait upon your whim, as if I were a common footman," declared the steward with emphasis, his voice vibrant with injured pride and anger.

This proved too much for the hot-blooded young baron. With flaming eyes and choking voice he started up from his chair and stood facing the intruder. "You cur, you despicable cur!" he roared, "I demand that you show due respect for me, your master. How dare you force your vile presence upon me in this room without so much as a knock to announce your coming? How dare you use such words or assume such airs in addressing me? You forget yourself, fellow! You forget who I am!"

"Forget who you are?" mocked the steward with such brazen assurance, such consummate self-possession as to put the baron completely in the wrong. "What are you but a boy—a headstrong, irresponsible boy, who needs a wise head and a firm hand to manage him? What would Mountain Oaks amount to without my management? Where would you be to-day without the moral and financial backing of Colonel Heine?"

Stricken dumb by the elemental power of the truth in the steward's words, but one recourse was open to the enraged youth. He rushed to the door, flung it wide, and imperiously motioned the steward out of his presence. Without realizing it, Uno was at this moment every inch the master. The steward wavered and was lost. Silent and with drooping crest he slunk out of the room.

But when the baron was again alone in his office, he

felt none of the joy of victory. Shame and humiliation filled his heart. In his anger he failed to see that it was the *truth* in the steward's words which had wounded him so deeply, and his wounded pride sought only for some means of redress. Gladly would he have dismissed the man on the spot, had he dared to take such drastic measures. But where find another as capable as Mr. Skoglund to manage the estate? And even if such a one could be secured, it would entail so much additional worry that his easy-going nature shuddered at the very thought of it. In some way he must contrive to escape from the soul-killing routine of a life whose sordid details were daily becoming more trying and unendurable.

Whatever the consequences, and however his actions might be frowned upon at Birgerhouse, he determined to break loose from the monotony of life at Mountain Oaks and hie away to the pleasures of the provincial capital.

\* \* \*

Colonel Heine uttered no word of protest or remonstrance, when Uno informed him of his intended journey to the capital. In his relief at this the young baron was not even sure that the colonel had fully understood the reason which made it so imperative for him to attend the governor's ball.

"The governor's wife," Uno explained, "is my mother's cousin. And for that reason I can't see how it is possible for me to avoid the trouble and expense of attending the inaugural ball."

Secretly, Uno prided himself upon his finesse in hitting upon so valid an excuse for his trip to the capital, though, if the truth must be told, he had never before

given a sober thought to any duty which he might owe to this distant relative of his.

But Ringmor, with the transparent frankness which was so characteristic of her, declared outright her disapproval of a journey, the sole aim of which was her lover's rather quixotic sense of duty as to his attendance at the new governor's inaugural ball.

"O Uno!" she pleaded, "bear with me. I have an unreasoning dread of this contemplated journey of yours. Something tells me that you ought not to go!"

But Uno, dismissing her fears as childish, urged that he had given his word to Captain Hall, and that, in consequence, he must go whether he would or not.

Ringmor remained silent for some time, seeking desperately for some means to prevent Uno from making this trip.

"Uno," she said at last, "you know that I have never asked a direct personal favor from you, but now I beg of you to remain at home."

It was difficult for Uno to resist her pleading tone and her beseeching look, but he had set his heart on this journey to the capital, and so he remained deaf to her entreaties. His very soul cried out for a change from the petty cares and deadly monotony of his life at Mountain Oaks. The narrow path of duty had palled on him; he must venture forth into other paths, where he could breathe more freely and live once more the alluring life of the gay world about him.





## V.

It was breakfast time at Mountain Oaks. Baron von Stedt sat in solitary state in the dining room, partaking of the many dishes which Mrs. Strand in her joy at having her young master home again had prepared for him. Sitting thus surrounded by the comforts of home, he should have been in a happy frame of mind, but this was far from the case, for the expenses, the unhappy expenses of the journey, kept obtruding themselves upon his thoughts. He did not stop to sum up the grand total—he did not dare to do so, for it might spoil his appetite and rob him of his new-found joy of life, a thing to be carefully guarded against. Better, then, to live over again in fancy the gayeties in which he had figured as one of the leading characters. That would at least serve to brighten the drab monotony of the life he was to resume.

But out in the kitchen sat Mats, the coachman, rehearsing to Mrs. Strand the story of the wonderful expedition to the gay world of the capital. He had accompanied his master and had many and strange things to relate of the long journey, the countless post

stations where their horses were exchanged, the final arrival at the magnificent city with its paved streets and grand houses, and last but not least, the resplendent festivities in which their young baron had outshone all the assembled guests.

"It was wonderful to see how universally honored our young lieutenant was by the gentry of the province," concluded old Mats, stroking his long beard complacently, and taking no small share of the honor unto himself for being the servant of such a master. "I was standing in the garden right by the open window of the governor's mansion and could see it all. I tell you, it did my old eyes good to see the way all the fine ladies and gentlemen vied with each other to pay their respects to our master. But then, that's only natural, seeing that he is a near relative of her ladyship, and himself in many respects a remarkable young man."

Mrs. Strand was pottering back and forth in her kitchen, busily engaged with her household cares, but not too busy to listen with growing interest to the glowing account of the coachman. Vivid pictures of similar festivities arose in her mind from the days when she herself was young, and it warmed and rejuvenated her old heart to live over again in fancy the brighter and happier days of long ago.

"O yes, the fine gentry have not forgotten the art of enjoying themselves," she observed, when Mats came to a breathless pause in his narrative. "Well can I remember many a similar scene of pomp and gayety in the merry days of my youth."

But Mats was not listening. The breakfast, spread before him, was demanding his closest attention, and besides his thoughts had suddenly taken a somber turn,

which was clearly reflected in his countenance. Without warning he struck the table a resounding blow which sent the dishes rattling, while he exclaimed earnestly: "It's the gospel truth, Mrs. Strand, and I want you to remember that I said so; if the gentry continue their giddy whirl of balls and festivities, they will dance straight to perdition! The solemn word of God keeps ringing in my ears: 'The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.'"

Astonishment and fright were clearly depicted in the face of the housekeeper. The violence of the coachman as well as his words had affected her strangely.

"My dear Mats," she said anxiously, "what has got into you? You talk and act like a crazy man. You know as well as I do that the gentry must have their swing at balls and festivities, and that we, common folk, must minister to their pleasures. So it has always been, and so it will be till the end of time, I suppose."

But Mats was not greatly impressed by her words. It was clearly to be seen that his own thoughts were stirring the depths of his usually placid nature.

"Sit down a moment, Mrs. Strand," he urged. "Strange times are approaching, let me tell you, soul-searching times for us all. For while they were dancing and feasting at the governor's mansion, thousands of anxious souls were gathered in another part of the great city to listen to the most wonderful preaching I have ever heard."

Mrs. Strand had actually subsided upon a kitchen chair, ready to listen to the wonderful things Mats had to relate; but when she discovered that it was nothing more than the rantings of a revival preacher, she arose

uneeremoniously to resume her interrupted duties. This, however, only spurred Mats to renewed efforts to gain her attention and interest.

"Sit down, I beg, sit down!" he urged. "You must listen to the wonderful news I have to tell you."

But the housekeeper was deaf to his entreaties. As a good Christian, she had neither the time nor the patience to waste on these newfangled notions of religion. More important to her were the duties demanding her immediate attention over at the kitchen range with its sputtering fire and bubbling pots.

For some time Mats sat regarding her with thoughtful mien. On his long journey home from the capital he had planned to discuss this new religious movement with Mrs. Strand, but now it seemed that she was not at all interested in it. When he had sat listening to the evangelist in the great city, he had come to the conclusion that it might be well for poor old souls like himself to lay hold on the wonderful promises presented with such convincing power and inspired eloquence. Mats was only a simple, unlettered old man, without power to analyze the thoughts and feelings stirring within him; but this he was beginning to realize, that the deepest instincts of his soul, so long dormant, had been roused and stirred mightily by the impassioned words of the evangelist, telling again the old, old story of a Saviour who had forsaken the mansions of his heavenly Father that he might take upon himself the sins of the world, and, as a friend of the poor and needy, bear their burdens and share their sorrows.

Rising suddenly, he strode over to Mrs. Strand with heavy, clamping steps, fully determined to do his duty as he saw it.

"Has it ever occurred to you, Mrs. Strand, that you have a God in heaven?" he asked solemnly, awkwardly patting the old housekeeper on the shoulder to show her that no offense was intended, and that he was actuated by the best of motives in putting this question to her.

Dumb with amazement, the frail form of the little housekeeper shrunk from his touch, and the kettle lid she was holding in her hand fell clattering to the floor, while she stood regarding Mats with mingled feelings of fear and displeasure. Now it happened that she was well aware that her old friend, the coachman, had been a little too free with the bottle on more than one occasion during the long years of their acquaintance. What more natural, then, that she should come to the conclusion that he had fortified himself with a glass or two before coming in to breakfast, and that his strange words and demeanor were to be thus explained.

"The best you can do is to go to bed and sleep off the effects of your potations!" she exclaimed impatiently, as she stooped to pick up the lid from the floor. "How dare you ask a lifelong Christian woman if she has ever thought of her God in heaven? If you gave more thought to God yourself, you would not be tipsy so early in the day."

But even as she uttered this diatribe on the failings of her old friend, the truth was brought home to her that he really was sober, and that he had actually experienced a something which had in some inexplicable way transformed him into the new and strange creature she was finding it so difficult to understand.

"You know that I am perfectly sober," declared Mats solemnly. "But I am free to confess that the first days I spent in the capital I drank as often as opportunity

offered. But from the very day I first attended the revival meetings in the city, I have lost all desire for strong drink. The day is gone and past now, when old Mats will drink himself drunk as often as he has the chance."

"That must have been some wonderful preaching you listened to!" she exclaimed, growing interested in spite of herself. For how often had she not tried to prevail on him to leave the bottle alone, but without success!

"You may be sure it was wonderful preaching," replied Mats, "and altogether different from anything I ever heard before. I only wish that you had been there to hear it, for I couldn't begin to tell you what was said."

"Oh, yes, you can, Mats; you've always had a glib tongue," answered Mrs. Strand coaxingly, sinking down upon the wooden bench by the wall. "Besides, you must remember that I, poor creature, can't get out any more to see and hear what is going on in the world."

She understood well enough that Mats would like to tell her if he could, but that it was far easier for him to tell of the journey, the wayside inns, the post horses, and the grand festivities in the capital. For such things he had a ready flow of words. But he would never have been able to describe the wonderful change that had been wrought in him, and the manner and means by which it had been brought about, had not this very change gifted him with an eloquence as simple as it was unconscious.

"As you know, Mrs. Strand, we have been taught from childhood that the Lord God sits on his high throne in heaven with power and great glory, surrounded by a mighty host of angels, who do his bidding, and that he shall judge the quick and the dead. We also

know that his eyes are as a flame of fire, and that his voice peals louder than the crashing thunder. But while we have been aware of this fearful power and majesty of God, we have not feared him as we ought. He has been so far removed from us that it did not seem possible for him to take notice of our doings on earth, and so we have done pretty much as we pleased, especially since the strong arm of his wrath failed to visit us with threatened punishment. I fear that I, and many with me, have acted on the theory that the good Lord was growing dull of vision in these latter days."

Mats paused to look questioningly at the housekeeper, who silently nodded for him to continue. She realized now that his words were true, and that it was only on rare and extraordinary occasions that she had been a bit afraid of God almighty, whose real presence in the affairs of men she had seldom thought of.

"But from the very day I first listened to the evangelist in the city, a new, queer sensation, impossible to describe, crept over me and filled my soul. I felt as never before that the flaming eyes of an avenging God were upon me—had, indeed, been upon me all my life. He knew every time I had been drunk, every time I had been cruel to my horses, and all my shortcomings, and my misdeeds."

After another pause Mats continued musingly: "It is dangerous for one to be out on a hot summer day with the sun beating down mercilessly upon your bare head; but worse, much worse are those flaming eyes searing your very soul with no chance of escape, no hope of relief!"

Mats nursed his head in his hands as he spoke, so

vivid, so real were those flaming eyes, consuming him. And yet, there was so much, so very much more to tell. How was he to find strength to continue his narrative?

With an effort he collected his scattered faculties and resumed: "Already I felt myself hurled over the brink into the bottomless pit, 'where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched,' when there was a sudden change in the words and intonation of the preacher. In accents breathing the very essence of divine love he began to speak of Jesus Christ, the Shepherd seeking the lost sheep, the compassionate Friend of sinners. Of course I had heard this before, and knew in a general way who he was, and what was his mission on earth; but never, never had I realized that I, poor worm that I am, was the special object of his grace and mercy."

By this time his voice was trembling with ill-concealed emotion, and large tears were coursing unchecked down his furrowed cheeks.

"O Mrs. Strand, can you grasp what all this meant to me? But no, the joy, the relief I felt, must be experienced to be understood! In all my life no one has ever cared for me. I have never known a father's care, a mother's love. A poor outcast from earliest childhood, I lived on the parish until I was old enough to shift for myself. After many ups and downs I, a drunken sot, was accepted by the old master of Mountain Oaks as his coachman, and here I have lived ever since without thought of reform or change of heart. And now to think that God, my heavenly Father, loved me all this time, that his heart was overflowing with compassion and mercy for such a wretch as myself—the thought overpowers me!"

Compassion and mercy—he had uttered the words

with lingering tenderness, for they recalled vividly a long cherished memory of childhood. How well he remembered the scene now! He, a starveling boy, suffering from cold and privation, had seen a beautiful, well-dressed lad of his own age come hurrying down the street. His face was radiant with joy, his arms eagerly outstretched toward a tall, handsome gentleman approaching from the opposite direction. "Papa, papa," the lad had shouted joyfully, as the two met, and the father's eager arms had caught up the jubilant boy and folded him in a close and loving embrace. Mats had never forgotten the scene. Times without number he had dreamed that his own father had come to clasp him to his bosom. In his waking hours he had often tried to fancy what it would mean to feel a father's tender arms about him, and to know that at last there was an end to the cares and troubles of life. But neither his dreams nor his fancies had ever come true, and in despair he had tried to drown in the flowing cup the great yearning of his soul.

But now the miracle had been wrought! In spirit old Mats was a child again. God's love was clasping him as with a father's arms, and the great yearning of his soul had won fruition at last, for he had found rest and peace in the arms of his heavenly Father.

Mrs. Strand had listened closely to his words and had anxiously noted the play of emotion in his countenance. She had grasped with perfect understanding his dramatic description of the eyes that glowed as a flame of fire, but all the rest was unintelligible to her, was at best the mad raving of a disordered mind. She was beginning to fear that the preacher's words had warped and twisted what little reason still remained to her old

friend Mats. It must surely be stuff and nonsense for a person to speak, in the same breath, of the flaming eyes of an avenging God and the compassionate love of a tender Father.

"My dear Mats," she exclaimed, "I am afraid you heard too much preaching while you were at the capital. You will lose what little sense you have, if you try to reason about matters which only preachers have the training and the brains to ponder on without growing daft and silly."

Mats shook his head resignedly, knowing full well that she was sadly mistaken. It was true that he had heard a deal of preaching while in the city, but too much—oh no! gladly would he have listened to much more of it; for it was making his poor, starved life brighter and richer, and filling his heart with a new, glad wonder, which he could not explain.

"Let me tell you, Mrs. Strand," concluded Mats, speaking with conviction, "one can hear too much of dancing and feasting and other sinful pleasures of the world; but this I know, that one can never hear too much of the glad tidings of salvation, for to hear this message is to be invited as a starving beggar to feast at the table of a king."

"I verily believe that you have lost your senses, Mats!" cried Mrs. Strand, now thoroughly frightened by his strange words and actions. "Whatever am I to do with such a rattlebrain as you have become?"

At this juncture the door was jerked open violently, and the steward entered the kitchen. There was an angry gleam in his eye as he bawled out: "So here I find you at last, you lazy old reprobate! I have hunted all over the place for you. How long am I to be kept

waiting, I wonder, before you deign to get the spring wagon ready for me; or, perhaps, you have no intention of doing it at all?"

For years the steward and the coachman had waged a silent but determined warfare with only an occasional outburst like the present. Mats had seen service on many estates before he came to Mountain Oaks, and he had imbibed an exaggerated respect, which almost amounted to reverence, for nobility in general and for his young master, the baron, in particular—a feeling which the steward was far from sharing with him. Hence Mats had long been an eyesore to Mr. Skoglund, who had tried repeatedly to have him dismissed from the place. But the baron had always insisted that Mats remain, even though his days of usefulness were almost a thing of the past.

"I will get the wagon ready at once, Mr. Skoglund," said Mats meekly, as he hurried toward the door. "Pardon my neglect, which shall not occur again, I promise you."

For a moment the steward could only stand and stare at him. This was not the old Mats with whom he had been at swords' points for years. The old reprobate had known only too well that he was under the baron's protection, and when in the humor, had not been afraid to return in kind the steward's angry words.

Before Mr. Skoglund had time to reply, Mats had already closed the door, and was off to his neglected work.

"What ails the old fellow?" inquired the steward inquisitively of Mrs. Strand. He knew that the old housekeeper was far from well disposed toward him, and that he could not count on a satisfactory answer from

her, but his curiosity prompted him to put the question.

"Tell me, if you can," snapped Mrs. Strand.

"If I knew, I wouldn't have asked you," retorted the steward.

"Well, I can't satisfy your curiosity", replied Mrs. Strand, turning her back to him.

"You won't, is what you mean," he retorted testily, "for ordinarily you and Mats keep pretty close track of each other. You two think that you sit firm in the saddle here at Mountain Oaks, but I give you fair warning that you may take a cropper one of these days before you know it."

With this parting shot he strode out of the kitchen, slamming the door with a force that shook the house.

Mrs. Strand smiled derisively, as she began in a leisurely manner to make her preparations for dinner, all the while voicing her thoughts in mumbled words, as those are wont to do who live the greater part of their lives in solitude.

"These men folks, I must say, are queer creatures. I can't help thinking of poor old Mats and his ravings. Is he going crazy, I wonder, or has he entered upon his second childhood? Let me see, what was it he said? Yes, now I remember; it was something about a starving beggar feasting at the table of a king. Mm! fine prospects, indeed, for such as we, but hardly likely to be realized! Common folks are common folks, and gentry are gentry, and both know their place in life. To my thinking common folks will continue to set the table and wait upon the gentry while they eat."

Her thoughts took another turn, when she caught the angry tones of the steward from the stable yard. He

had pitched his voice so high that she could hear his every word.

"So now he is in one of his tantrums again, that lowbred, provoking steward. I could wish that I would see the day when his big hulking back would be disappearing down the lane for good and all. What is a poor body to do with those who are neither common folks nor gentry? They think themselves too good to set the table for others, and they are not fit to sit down at table with gentlefolks—their hands are too dirty. There he goes again, shouting and carrying on as if he were a prince of the realm at least, but let me tell you, my fine steward, that all your noise will never make a gentleman of you. Keep your hands clean, Mr. Skoglund, and don't forget to wipe your nose!"

She chuckled silently at her own conceit; so light-hearted and happy was she to have her young master home again. For though the baron was an exalted personage in her eyes, her thoughts dwelt on him with the caressing tenderness of a mother. She dearly loved to sit and plan his meals, carefully considering what would appeal to his palate, and when he would praise her cooking, her joy and happiness knew no bounds.

\* \* \*

It was well along in the afternoon of the same day, and Mrs. Strand was taking a well-earned nap in her chamber, when the door flew open and Edith breezed into the room.

"Here I am again, mother," she exclaimed, as one sure of her welcome. "Aren't you glad to see me?"

By this time the mother had rubbed the sleep out of

her eyes and was sitting erect in her bed, staring in sheer amazement at the unexpected visitor.

"Child, how have you managed to return to Mountain Oaks?" she inquired, trying bravely to repress the anxiety surging within her.

"Nothing easier," replied the daughter with perfect composure. "I have walked and ridden and run by turns, so eager was I to reach here."

"And why were you so eager to reach here, why are you here at all?"

But Edith pretended not to notice her mother's anxiety. With cool presumption she laid aside her hat and coat, after which she faced her mother and said banteringly: "To think that you have no word of welcome for me, mother. I must say that you have a strange way of receiving your own daughter."

"Are you intending to stay here for any length of time?" inquired the poor, distracted mother, swayed only by maternal solicitude for her child.

Edith burst into laughter not good to hear. There was no joy in it—only a thinly veiled contempt of her mother's old-fashioned notions of propriety, which stabbed and wounded the mother's heart, as nothing else could.

"Do I intend to stay here?" she mocked. "I could almost make up my mind to it, because you give me so cool a reception. But you need have no fear, mother mine, I am only here for a visit, and to inform you that I have left my place and have made arrangements to take up my abode in the vacated keeper's lodge on the estate of Captain Hall."

Edith's words caused the mother's frail form to shrink and shrivel as a leaf before the first icy blast of winter.

"No, no, no, child!" The cry was wrung from her anguished heart. "You must not think of it! O, you must not!"

"Nothing can prevent me now, mother," replied Edith with desperation. Her mother's grief had touched her callous heart, but not so deeply as to cause her to alter her plans.

In her heart Mrs. Strand knew that she was powerless to move her headstrong daughter from her purpose, but notwithstanding this all her mother's love rose to meet the issue. Her wayward girl must be stayed, must be saved from entering the way she had determined upon.

"How did you come to determine upon such a course?" asked the sorrowing mother. "I thought that you were so happy and contented in your new place."

"Oh, it was well enough," remarked Edith carelessly. "Indeed, I would have been perfectly contented there, if I had never seen Mountain Oaks. But as it is, all my waking thoughts by day and my dreams by night have been centered upon this place, and so my life became unbearable, and I had to have a change."

"But don't you see that it is quite impossible for you to remain in this neighborhood? I will never, never permit it!" The words were uttered with a dignity and a power that brought a flush of shame and contrition to Edith's face. A mother's authority was asserting itself, a mother's direct command was calling for instant obedience, and the daughter was finding it hard to disregard the call. If Edith was to maintain her ground, she must intrench herself behind an utter indifference to the wishes and entreaties of her mother.

"I might have known it," she exclaimed wildly. "I might have known that you would close your door to

me! And let me tell you, mother, I would never have come, had it not been for an accidental meeting with Baron von Stedt."

At the mention of the baron's name the young girl's eyes flamed with a passion that she would not and could not hide. At this moment she had entirely forgotten the humiliation which had driven her forth from Mountain Oaks. She had spoken the truth, when she said that her meeting with Uno was accidental, for it had happened when she had accompanied her mistress on a journey to the city. The result was that her future had again assumed a most roseate hue. Forgotten or entirely disregarded was the existence of such a person as Ringmor Heine.

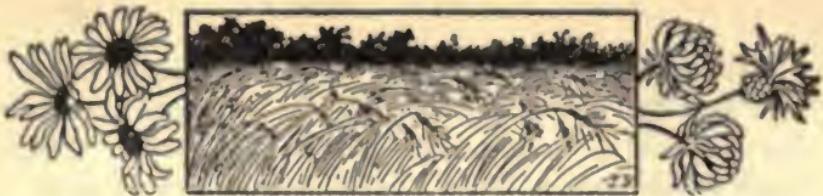
"Child, child, what are you thinking of?" cried Mrs. Strand with utter abandon. "You will make yourself unhappy for life, and perhaps destroy the happiness of others. In your blindness you fail to realize what you are doing, but from bitter experience I, your mother, can see it all plainly."

Edith made no attempt to contradict her mother. What could a dim-eyed old woman like her mother be expected to know of the glory and joy of life? The glowing fires of youth were long since burned to ashes within her. Old and feeble, she was tottering on the brink of the grave. It was the mother who was blind, while she, the daughter, could peer into the bright vistas of the future and see a life teeming with the pulsing joys of existence. But just because her life was so rich, so overflowing with potential happiness, she felt that she must be kind and considerate to her overanxious mother, and allay her fears as best she could.

"Come, come, mother," she urged soothingly, "we will drop the matter for the present. In your anxiety you are making a mountain out of a molehill. The truth is that I have left my place because I wish to be independent of others, and for this reason alone I am moving into the keeper's lodge, where I intend to support myself by laundry work for the gentry of the neighborhood. There is a growing demand for such work, and you know that I am fully competent to do it."

Vainly the mother tried to dissuade her daughter from her purpose. Edith remained deaf and obdurate to all her entreaties.





## VI.

Later in the evening when Edith had left her mother for the new abode in the keeper's lodge, Mrs. Strand made haste to seek out her old friend Mats. He it was who had counseled her on a former occasion to seek the aid of Count Heine, when she was in sore need of help and guidance. Perhaps old Mats would again prove a friend in need and advise her as to what she had better do in the new, pressing emergency which she had encountered.

The coachman lived in a small chamber in a remote wing of the rambling manor house. She found him busily engaged in mending the frayed lining of his threadbare coat of livery. It was something unusual for Mats to concern himself with such a trivial matter as his personal appearance. In fact, his young master had on more than one occasion remarked jokingly that it would never do for his coachman to appear in public in rags and tatters, which remarks had hitherto failed to produce the desired result owing to the easy-going nature of both master and servant. It is true that before his memorable journey to the capital Mrs. Strand had done her best to make his livery presentable, but

she had found the lining so far gone that she had not deemed it worth her while to attempt any repairs.

"Are you mending that old coat again, Mats?" she inquired upon entering the room. "Didn't I patch it up to your satisfaction?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" replied Mats eagerly. "The outside is as good as new, but the lining was a little frayed and ripped in the seams."

"I declare, you are growing particular for a man of your age!" she ejaculated. "You are so unlike yourself of late that I don't know you at all."

Involuntarily her eyes swept over the chamber, and to her growing surprise she noticed that the ordinarily untidy room had been cleaned and set to rights, until it lacked little of being a model of orderliness.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, "how fine we are getting to be!"

"You see, I felt that I had to tidy up a little," he remarked apologetically. "I felt that I was no longer alone, and that he who had come to live with me was no lover of dirt and disorder."

At his words Mrs. Strand looked apprehensively about the room with an uncanny sensation of an unseen presence. Quick to take affright, she was eager to flee from surroundings which filled her heart with superstitious dread, but her mother love stayed her. Come what might, she must seek the advice of her old friend, the coachman.

"Mats!" she exclaimed feverishly, eager to accomplish her purpose and be gone, "I have come for a bit of advice which only you can give."

"You must not expect too much of old Mats," he replied meekly.

"There now, leave that old coat to me," she expostulated, "I will make it spick-and-span for you before morning. Now listen to me a moment!"

Nothing loth, Mats surrendered his coat to Mrs. Strand and subsided into an attitude of attention. When she had repeated her tale of woe, Mats sat for a long time in a brown study. As the minutes passed, the silence was becoming unbearable to the old housekeeper, who all the while sat squirming and fidgeting in her chair.

"Do you think that I should make another attempt to communicate with Count Heine at Birgerhouse?" she ventured at last, when the tension had reached the bursting point.

"When the good God sees fit to send trouble upon us, no human being can be of any help," murmured Mats as though to himself.

"But don't you think that the count can arrange this matter for me again, as he did once before?"

Mats did not reply. Sunk in deep reverie he sat and stared before him, while before his mind's eye all the people he had ever known were passing in review. He saw the burdens weighing them down, the sorrows filling their hearts, all, all the sad train of misery and woe caused by sin, and he caught a glimpse of the beneficent divine purpose of it all, namely, to drive the weary and the heavy-laden into the Father's loving arms, ever ready and willing to receive them, even as these same arms had received him. Back of all the gloom and misery in the world he could descry a love divine, ever beckoning, ever urging and impelling sinful man to yield himself to God.

"Real help is not to be had from the count," he said

at last, "but I can tell you a simpler and more effective way to get the help you need."

"Out with it then, Mats! Don't you see how unhappy I am? How have you the heart to keep from me so long what I am dying to learn?"

Grasping his old friend's hand, Mats said impressively: "God alone can give you the help you need!"

Poor Mrs. Strand! Her hopes, which had mounted so high, were sadly dashed. What kind of advice was this to give a person who needed instant and *material* help?

"You may keep such advice to yourself, I want none of it," she snapped in a tone full of injury and disappointment. What was she now to do, where turn to find assistance for the rescue of her child? Leaden was the weight of care resting on her shoulders. Her deepest shame and sorrow at her own fall had never weighed so heavily upon her as did now her mortal dread for her wayward child.

Rising heavily, she prepared to depart, but Mats laid a detaining hand on her.

"No, no, don't go yet," he urged. "Perhaps you will not disdain my advice, if you let me finish what I have to say."

Almost against her will she sank back upon the chair. She would much rather be gone, for she had now little hope of help from this quarter.

"We have known each other a long time, Mrs. Strand," he began gently. "In fact your whole life is an open book to me. When you were young and gay and pretty as Edith is now, I was also in my best days. We met frequently at dances and parties, and when the young people were assembled round the Maypole, young

Mats was happy as a prince, if the dainty Malin Strand, the fairest of May queens, deigned to grant a dance to him. I had hopes, then, of something better; gladly would I have loved and shielded you through life. But you would have none of me, for you were looking higher, much higher in those days of your greatest happiness. Then came the great sorrow of your life. Proudly you determined to face it and bear it alone. Even then I sued for the privilege of being your protector, but though you gave me your friendship, you denied me all else. And so we drifted apart. I tried to drown my grief in drink; you bore yours patiently and bravely, finding joy and comfort in a mother's love and care of her little daughter, who, as the years passed, grew to be as the apple of your eye. The old wounds were forgotten—forgotten but not healed. And now because of Edith the old wounds are open and bleeding again. What you endured so bravely in your own case, you cannot bear to think of even as a possibility where Edith is concerned. She, at least, must be saved!"

Mrs. Strand had listened closely to his words, in which Mats had unconsciously revealed a constancy and an affection little suspected by her. But she did not permit her thoughts to dwell long on this, she was too intent upon finding a way to realize the final words he had uttered.

"Yes, Edith must be saved, she must be saved!" she repeated tremulously, her frail form quivering with eagerness. "But tell me, what am I to do?"

Immediate and unerring came the answer from Mats: "If you will permit God to save you first, he will surely find a way to save your daughter. Don't you begin to understand that God permitted the great sorrow to over-

take you in your youth, so that you might heed his warning voice? But when you closed your ears and your heart to him, he sent you this greater trial to compel the attention to his words you were so unwilling to give."

But Mrs. Strand had no further desire to listen to such foolish chatter from old Mats. It was a sheer waste of time, and she had none to lose, for she understood now that if anything was to be done to save Edith, she must do it herself and do it at once.

"Let me tell you, Mats, that God sits on his high throne in heaven, and it is useless for a poor beggar like yourself to try to persuade me that God talks with folks nowadays. We are not living back in the times of Noah and Moses, I should hope!"

With these words she left the room, as uncertain of what to do as when she had entered it.

Old Mats picked up the coat which Mrs. Strand had forgotten to take along. He sat down to finish the mending, while he mused sadly on the perversity of his old friend.

"She does not *wish* to listen, but I know that sooner or later she *must* do so, for she cannot long endure to bear this sorrow alone."

\* \* \*

The next evening Mrs. Strand again entered the kitchen at Birgerhouse and requested to have a word with the count.

"I'm afraid it can't be managed," replied the house-keeper curtly, for she was very busy and did not like to be bothered. "You see, some visitors have arrived unexpectedly, and the count is engaged with them."

Mrs. Strand felt that these were words of dismissal to her, but she could not bring herself to go. She must have a word with Colonel Heine, for was he not the only one now who could help her?

"Dear Mrs. Vinkler," she pleaded humbly, "do manage it so that I can see the count if only for a moment."

Just then the door flew open, and Miss Ringmor entered the kitchen hurriedly. She was clad in a soft white dress, that set off her slender, girlish figure admirably, and the sparkle of a solitaire in an antique setting at her throat matched perfectly the deep luster of her soulful eyes.

Mrs. Strand had, of course, seen Miss Heine before, for the young lady had often visited Mountain Oaks, but it had never occurred to her that Ringmor was so stately, so aristocratic as she seemed now. How could her own poor, insignificant Edith dream of supplanting this glorious being in the affections of Baron von Stedt?

"There is an old woman here who insists on having a word with the colonel," Mrs. Vinkler informed Ringmor. "I have told her that it is quite impossible, but she is obstinate and will not take a refusal."

"So you wish to speak with my father?" inquired Ringmor pleasantly. "I will go in and find out if he can see you now."

Whereupon Ringmor disappeared as suddenly as she had entered.

"Sit down while you wait," said the housekeeper in a tone quite different from that she had used before. If her mistress did not consider Mrs. Strand's visit inopportune, she, Mrs. Vinkler, certainly had no reason to do so.

Presently a footman appeared with the announcement

that the count was waiting in his office, whither he proceeded to conduct the visitor.

Mrs. Strand could not help noticing that Count Heine started violently, when he perceived who his visitor was. His tone was frigid, as he asked her to be seated and to state her errand. But as on that former occasion, so now she found it difficult to begin, and when she marked that her silence was making him impatient, this served only to increase her embarrassment. She fidgeted about in the great armchair, fingered the wood carvings with which it was ornamented, but could hit upon no way to break the silence.

"Has anything untoward happened?" the count finally asked, after waiting in vain for Mrs. Strand to state her errand.

Startled out of her silence, she sobbed: "My daughter has left her place and has come to live in this neighborhood, and I have been unable to prevent it."

To all outward appearance the news made no impression on Count Heine. Nevertheless it was noticed that the pace of the rocker in which he was sitting increased perceptibly.

"I am sorry that your daughter's behavior is causing you anxiety," he remarked after a pause, "but I hardly see how I can be of any service to you in this matter."

"But I must tell you that my daughter would never have taken this step, had she not met Baron von Stedt and been so advised by him."

Colonel Heine found it convenient not to understand what the old woman was hinting at, so in a perfectly level tone he inquired casually: "What is your daughter going to do when she settles down here? That question has been thought of, I presume?"

"O yes, your lordship!" Mrs. Strand hastened to reply, "she is planning to do laundry work for the gentry in the neighborhood, but—"

"I understand," the count interrupted. "You fear that this work will not be sufficient for her support, but I think you are mistaken in this. Your daughter will, no doubt, get all the work she can do, and you will see that matters will arrange themselves much better than you anticipate."

He nodded his encouragement to her and rose from his chair. Mrs. Strand rightly interpreted his action as a dismissal. Suddenly the solemn words of Mats recurred to her and sent a thrill of awe through her soul: "When the good God sees fit to send trouble upon us, no human being can be of any help." She understood now how true the words were. How much had she not expected of this visit to the count, and what had she gained? Nothing, absolutely nothing!

Rising from her chair, she made a deep curtsy and swayed toward the door as one in a dream.

"Where is your daughter to live?" the count asked as she reached the door.

"In the keeper's lodge on Captain Hall's estate," she replied mechanically.

"Very well, Mrs. Strand, I will see to it that my daughter sends her laundry there."

Again Mrs. Strand curtsied her thanks for his gracious promise. But in her heart she felt no gratitude, for well she knew that her daughter's laundry work was a mere pretext.

Heavy were her steps and oppressive her thoughts, as she wended her weary way homeward through the gathering gloom. Heartsick with grief and anxiety,

she longed for death as a relief—but no, she must live, live to battle for her child, to save her child!

\* \* \*

When old Mats entered the kitchen at Mountain Oaks the following morning, Mrs. Strand could see that he had something on his mind which he wished to unburden to her. She wondered greatly what it might be, and to pave the way for the revelation which Mats seemed eager to make she sent the servant girl away to the dairy room on duties which would occupy her for some time.

"You had an errand to Birgerhouse yesterday afternoon?" he asked tentatively. "How did you find matters there?"

But Mrs. Strand had no intention to inform him of her disappointment. To do so would only add to her mortification.

"Why do you ask?" she inquired spitefully. "I thought that nothing interested you now, that did not savor of pietism and gospel-mongers."

"Tut, tut! Mrs. Strand, you are not in good humor this morning, I see. Your interview with Colonel Heine did not turn out as well as you had expected. Really, I am sorry that you were disappointed, but I felt all the while that it would be so. That, however, is not what I wished to ask you about. Something else happened over at Birgerhouse last night, which I thought that you might possibly have heard of."

"Your tongue wags so much of late that it makes me fairly distracted," mocked Mrs. Strand, as she set the steaming breakfast before her old friend Mats. "Whatever might it be, I should like to know, that happened at Birgerhouse last night?"

"Well then, would you believe it? There was preaching at the gardener's cottage over there last night, and people had gathered from far and near to attend it. I am only sorry that I didn't know of it until this morning."

Mrs. Strand now remembered that she had met many people tramping along the highway toward Birgerhouse, when she was on her way home the previous evening. There must be some truth in what Mats had to relate.

"I really think that you heard more of preaching than was good for you, while you were in the city," she remarked acrimoniously. "Surely, it can do an old man like you no good to be gadding about nights listening to strolling gospel-mongers!"

Mats laid aside his knife and fork, that he might be free to give proper emphasis to what he was about to say.

"Listen, Mrs. Strand! If it takes my last ounce of strength, I will be at the preaching to-night. And you must go along, for you need it if anyone does."

"Let me tell you, Mats, I wouldn't think of such a thing," she replied with emphasis. "Happily, I haven't quite lost my senses yet."

Mats made no further effort to persuade her. He fondly hoped and believed that in time she would be led into the light which was spreading its radiance over the final portion of his own pathway through life. She would not be able to withstand the power of God's love —it was so strong, she so weak!

\* \* \*

Colonel Heine had spent a restless night. The news which Mrs. Strand had brought had affected him un-

pleasantly. It proved clearly that no dependence was to be placed on the integrity and honor of Uno. Perhaps, though, the mother was overanxious for the welfare of her child. How gladly would he have believed it all to be a mere bagatelle, but the fear of its truth kept obtruding itself upon his thoughts.

What was he to do? Should he make another attempt to reason with Uno, to appeal to the nobler side of his nature? No, the count felt instinctively that he could not do it. Uno's behavior had effectually barred the way for this. Only one recourse remained by which he might reach the young lieutenant's better self, and that was through Ringmor. The count was fully cognizant of the young man's deep attachment for the friend of his boyhood and young manhood. If anyone could induce him to tread the narrow path of duty, it was Ringmor. But how impress upon her the importance of immediate and determined action? How tell her at all that anything had occurred to make such action imperative?

To these questions the count had no answer, but he hoped that some opportunity would offer the required solution.

As was her custom Ringmor read the morning paper to her father, after they had breakfasted together. Having read the articles which she thought would interest the colonel, she laid aside the paper and took up her embroidery, with which she busied herself while her father paced slowly back and forth in the dining room, evidently sunk in deep thought.

"What are you thinking of, father?" she finally asked, noting that something must be troubling his thoughts.

"I am thinking of Uno," the colonel replied, determining to come to a complete understanding with Ringmor on the subject of her lover.

Sitting down beside her on the sofa, he continued after a pause: "Yes, my little girl, I want to have a heart-to-heart talk with you about Uno."

"Have you any special reason for wishing to speak with me of Uno?" she inquired apprehensively.

"My dear child," replied the colonel, evading the question, "I have heard a great deal lately of the wide swath Uno cut while attending the festivities in the capital. That, of course, was not news to me, for it is only what may be expected of him, when he throws discretion to the winds in mingling with the gay set. But for your sake I will not tolerate it any longer, and if you have any pride at all, I should think it would compel you to spurn a lover who is continually dancing attendance upon any and every woman with a fair face and a fine figure."

A light flush crept into Ringmor's face. Her father's harsh words wounded her deeply, and her love rose in arms to strike a blow in defense of her lover.

"Uno is so thoughtless, papa," she admitted. "He acts on the spur of the moment, but he is filled with instant remorse for his lapses. We must not judge him too harshly."

But the colonel would hear of no compromise now; he was determined to force matters to an issue.

"Daughter!" he said sternly, "Uno's actions have transgressed all bounds of propriety. No further compromise is possible. If you still insist on linking your fate with his, you must make him understand that he

must show some regard for your name and station in life."

"I still have faith in Uno," she declared with flashing eyes and ringing voice. "The day I lose my faith in him will see the end of our engagement. But I know just how matters stand with Uno. He is full of fun and frolic, but he is far from going to the extremes which the gossiping ill will of nasty people would have one believe. Feminine coquetry exaggerates his every word and act, and makes capital of that which really amounts to nothing."

With a shrug of the shoulders the count manifested how unpleasant he found the entire situation. For he knew beyond a doubt that Uno had gone much further in his dallying with feminine hearts than his daughter deemed possible, and he grieved to think what a crushing blow it would be to Ringmor, if the whole truth ever became known to her. And how was it to be kept from her much longer, if Uno's reckless pace could not be checked at once? Further, how was he to induce Ringmor to remonstrate with her heedless lover, if no one supplied her with sufficient ground for such remonstrance? It all resolved itself to this, then: his daughter must be made to see Uno's faults, she must be firm and severe with him, otherwise there was no hope of any change for the better.

"I see very well that Uno enjoys your full confidence," the colonel replied sadly, "but you must also have some confidence in me. And I assure you, Ringmor, that it will never do for Uno to continue to carry on as he is doing at present! Tell him so, and tell it with emphasis! He will listen to you, I am sure, and yield to your wishes. Remember that by continually

overlooking and condoning his faults you make yourself a party to his misdeeds. A large share of the responsibility will then necessarily rest on you."

Ringmor did not reply to her father's words. She understood now that something must have happened which her father was trying to keep from her. But with the simple directness of her nature she felt assured that Uno would tell her what it was, as soon as she asked him about it upon his next visit to Birgerhouse.

\* \* \*

Several days elapsed before the young lieutenant presented himself at the manor house, and when he came, he was not alone. He was accompanied by Captain Hall, and on the way over they had fallen in with two of Ringmor's girl friends, whom they had persuaded to come along. The young people had come strolling up the drive, laughing and chattering gayly, Uno, as always, the gayest of the gay. Ringmor, who stood watching their approach, thought that she had never seen his face so radiant with good nature and happiness, and when he hurried forward to greet her with the light of love in his eye, all her dark forebodings vanished as the morning mists before the rising sun. Soon she was laughing and chattering as gayly as the rest—but the count remained somberly silent.

Quick to note that the count was not taking part in the conversation with his usual affability, Uno cast about in his mind for a topic which might interest their host. Already he more than suspected that for some reason the colonel was displeased with him. This in itself was bad enough, but to have it noticed by the others would be far worse. Above all, he was most anxious that Cap-

tain Hall should not get the idea that he, Baron von Stedt, was in any way accountable to the colonel for his manner of life, as though he were still a ward of the stern old man.

Seized with a happy thought, he interrupted the conversation, and turning to the count, he asked: "Have you heard, Uncle Heine, that the pietists are holding meetings in practically every house and cottage in the parish? Really, I fear that this pietistic movement will spread as an epidemic all over the land, if stern measures are not taken to check it."

Count Heine merely shook his head to indicate that all this was news to him. And not being acquainted with the movement itself, he manifested but slight interest in Uno's account of it. For though he prided himself on being a friend of the people, he knew in reality very little of the aims and interests, the hopes and aspirations lying deepest in the hearts of the people he professed to love.

"So far as I am concerned, the people may hold as many meetings as they please," he remarked indifferently. "So long as they fulfill their obligations to me as to labor and rentals, I will raise no objections, even if all my dependents become pietists."

But Uno differed widely with the colonel in this respect. From his steward he had imbibed certain pronounced views on pietism, which he now wished to air for the benefit of the colonel. Secretly he was congratulating himself that he had listened so closely to Mr. Skoglund's rambling harangue that morning on pietism in general and on his coachman's leaning in that direction in particular.

"You must not think, Uncle Heine, that this pietistic

movement is a matter of such indifference to you," he exclaimed eagerly. "Surely, it must concern you to know if your dependents are taking a well needed rest by night, or if they, old and young, men and women alike, are running up and down the parish attending revival meetings, and then only half awake attempt to perform their daily tasks."

"I know that I can depend on my people," replied the colonel with marked asperity. "They have always done their full duty to me hitherto, and whoever else may fall short in the future, I am sure they will not."

Uno felt the sting of personal allusion in these words, but he struggled desperately to appear untouched by the colonel's veiled attack, and to maintain his ground at all hazards.

"I am glad, I must say, to know that you have so great confidence in your people. But tell me, what would you say, if one of your tenants should come to you some fine day and admonish you to repent of your sins and attend their revival meetings?"

"I'd tell the fellow to keep his distance," replied the colonel curtly. "But I must say that I haven't the least fear of any such impertinence."

"Don't be too sure, Uncle Heine," laughed Uno. "I have an old coachman at home, who ordinarily is the most inoffensive of mortals; but since his trip to the city with me, he seems as if deranged. He is continually exhorting the other servants to lead better lives, and when I took him to task this morning and ordered him to stop his tomfoolery, he turned on me and begged me earnestly to consider the welfare of my immortal soul."

Uno could not help laughing at his own recital, and

many of the others joined in the merriment. But the colonel relapsed into silence, and Ringmor did not seem to think that there was anything in the story to laugh at. Captain Hall, however, and the ladies present had many questions to ask, which Uno was not slow to answer in his usual jocose vein. He hoped to draw a responsive smile from Ringmor, but the levity of the others served only to increase her own serious mien.

Finally she could contain herself no longer. Forgetful of her duty to her guests, she said bluntly: "I see nothing to laugh at in all this. No truly good and thoughtful person will hold up to mockery and ridicule the religious ideals of others. I think this is a case where we should show due deference, even if we cannot sanction."

"Spare us!" cried Uno. "Your mien no less than your words would lead one to suspect that you were in a fair way of becoming a pietist yourself. That would be a calamity, indeed!"

"Such a thing is not impossible," declared one of the young ladies in a tone not untouched by apprehension. "They say that pietism is in the very air, and that all who are susceptible will catch it as they would an infectious disease."

Captain Hall thought the moment propitious to air his superior knowledge, so he said: "Oh no, the infection is not in the fresh, invigorating air of outdoors; it is to be found in the small, stuffy cottages where people congregate in such numbers that not a breath of pure air can be had."

This launched the company into a lively discussion. The young lady who had spoken of pietism as an infection was not at all convinced by the captain's words.

She declared that she knew of a gifted young man who, after verging on insanity, had suddenly turned pietist.

"And he caught the infection," she concluded triumphantly, "not in some stuffy cottage, but while he was crossing a wide heath under the starry expanse of a clear winter night."

"Your story, pardon me, borders too close on the miraculous to be plausible," stoutly maintained the captain. "It is unthinkable that a man of education and refinement could become a pietist."

"But what do you mean by a pietist?" asked Ringmor, breaking into the discussion. "I must confess that I am at a loss as to the exact meaning of the term."

"I can enlighten you on that subject," cried Uno, stepping eagerly into the breach. "In former times pietists were quiet, inoffensive people, who sat in their homes reading the Bible or some book of sermons. But of late all this has been changed. Now they gather in large companies, where they sing and pray and preach till the small hours of the night. Of a sudden all pietists seem to have become visionaries and dreamers. I agree with Captain Hall that no refined person is capable of joining their ranks. But if you wish to make a study of pietism, you have an excellent opportunity to do so at close range. My coachman informs me that there is to be a meeting here at the gardener's cottage to-night at about this hour. I propose that we all go down on a tour of inspection."

Uno would never have ventured to make this proposal, had not Count Heine by this time withdrawn from the company. But there was still Ringmor to be reckoned with, and she expressed her disapproval in no uncertain terms.

"I, for one, am not going," she declared positively. "I consider it highly reprehensible of us to intrude on them merely for the purpose of criticism and ridicule. If these meetings are an expression of the religious feelings and necessities of the people, we do wrong to disturb them, especially as I fear that we have but a poor conception of what is stirring in the depths of their natures."

But Uno would not be denied. Despite Ringmor's protests he seized her arm with far from gentle insistence, saying: "Now, Ringmor, of course you will come along! Don't you see that your guests are eager to attend the meeting? The least you can do, as hostess, is to yield to their wishes."

There was no help for it, so much against her will she yielded to Uno's pleadings and started forth with the others.

"Do you think there is any danger?" anxiously asked one of the ladies. She was eager to go, but fearful of the dire consequences of the venture.

"Just think if I should catch the infection and suddenly become a pietist!" she protested.

All laughed at her childish fears—all but Ringmor.

"I wonder if Uncle Heine knows of these meetings?" asked Uno, addressing Ringmor.

"No, I don't think he does," she replied. "But even if he did, he would raise no objections to them, for he thinks very highly, indeed, of Mr. Linder, his gardener."

"I would never permit anything of the kind at Mountain Oaks," Uno declared positively.

In some way Uno had been seized with an overpowering aversion to anything that savored of pietism. There had been much talk in the capital, he remem-

bered, of this new religious movement, and he had been unpleasantly affected by it. The one word *sin*, on which the pietists harped without ceasing, seemed to him in so bad taste that the very thought of it nauseated him. But somehow it clung to his memory like a burr, though he would never think of associating the word with anything in his own life or conduct. *Sin!* An antiquated word, that had lost its significance in the enlightened times in which he lived. Why had it arisen from its grave to haunt and trouble him? But he dismissed the thought with the comforting reflection that the word held terrors only for the lowbred and vulgar, but was utterly meaningless to a man of his culture and refinement.

The gardener's cottage lay in a distant part of the extensive park surrounding the manor of Birgerhouse. The picturesque, red-painted cottage nestled snugly in an open glade of the forest-like park and was surrounded by a well kept truck garden. As children, Uno and Ringmor had often found their way to the humble home of the gardener and his estimable wife, Mother Anna, who had never failed to feast them with goodies and send them on their way laden with seasonable flowers. Now the gardener and his wife were old and gray, but hale and vigorous despite their years. Mother Anna's cheeks still bloomed with the red of her beloved roses, and Father Peter had seemingly lost none of his youthful vigor in attending to his multifarious duties in the park and greenhouses.

"The flight of time passes over one's head unnoticed, when one lives continually in the midst of sprouting plants and budding flowers," he had once remarked to the count. "To live in the open, as I do, is to renew

one's youth and to be thrilled with the never ceasing wonder and gladness of life."

As the windows and doors of the cottage were wide open, the young people from the manor could hear and observe without making their presence known to those assembled within. It was a Saturday evening, and a Sabbath calm seemed already to rest upon the assembly, for as they lifted their hearts in song and prayer to God, the toil and worry of their workaday existence seemed to slip from them, and the serenity and peace of the approaching Sabbath seemed to flood their souls. The weary found rest, and troubled hearts were comforted.

Such was the quiet and decorum of the meeting, much to Uno's disappointment, that he silently signaled to the others of his party that they should withdraw. One after another, they disappeared into the thick shadows of the park until Ringmor alone remained. Now that she was there she meant to hear the preaching and besides she wished to rebuke the rudeness of the others in departing so unceremoniously.

The preacher was a man from another parish. From his appearance Ringmor could see that he was much given to brooding. His deep-set, lustrous eyes caught and held the attention of his audience. At times these eyes would light up and shine with the warm radiance of a summer sun; at other times they would gleam and flash from under his lowering brows as bolts of lightning from a gathering storm cloud. Evidently the speaker possessed a certain amount of book learning. He had an apt way of expressing himself in a concise and orderly manner. But that he was a simple man of the people was evidenced by the rugged angularity of

his features, his large, callous hands, and a marked ungainliness in his movements and gestures.

But Ringmor's thoughts did not dwell long on these matters; all her powers of attention soon became engrossed by what the preacher had to say, for such preaching she had never heard in her life before. It was her habit to drive with her father to the parish church almost every Sunday, but, somehow, the sermons there had never appealed to her imagination or touched her heart, but had seemed to pass entirely over her head. But now her very soul seemed to hang on the speaker's words. Hers was a sensitive nature, keenly responsive to every call of duty, and when she noted lapses in this respect in herself or others, she suffered from it more than words can tell. A pitiless taskmaster where she herself was concerned, she was of late beginning to suspect that she was abating somewhat from the stern demands of rigid duty, partly because she found it more and more impossible to live up to her own high standards, and partly because she felt herself so deserted and alone. She recognized and admired the high moral ground her father had always taken with reference to all the outward acts of his life, but when she sought to model her life after his, she felt instinctively that there was something lacking. It began to dawn on her that the outward practices of morality, though good and desirable in themselves, might be but a cloak to hide a multitude of sins and shortcomings.

To her utter surprise and bewilderment she now found herself listening with rapt attention to a man who, in language simple and elemental, was driving home to her inner consciousness the inexorable demands of a

righteous God on mankind in general and herself in particular. The thunders of Sinai reverberated through her soul. The forceful words of this plain man of the people seemed as a scourge of God, smiting and lacerating her, until she grew faint with pain and anguish. But though the blows fell thick and fast, she recognized that she deserved them all—and more. Something within her demanded that a full meed of punishment be meted out to her, though her very life should pay the forfeit.

But there was another side of her nature that cringed and quailed before the crushing invective of the preacher, that in afright and terror sought to flee from the wrath to come.

The latter part of the sermon, however, she failed to understand; it seemed a direct contradiction of what he had said before. Clearly the preacher was nullifying the effect of his words by thus suddenly shifting his ground and enlarging upon the efficacy of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. The doctrine of the atonement through Christ Jesus had never appealed strongly to her. She had always held that the moral tone of society throughout the Christian world would have been far better, if all this mystical talk of atonement and propitiation for sins had not lulled men into a false security, which was hourly making them more careless and indifferent to the call of duty and right living.

When the preaching was ended, the assembly joined in singing a song with such intensity and fervor that it went straight to Ringmor's heart. She had never heard the song before, but both words and melody made a deep and lasting impression upon her, and the

countenances of the worshipers in the humble cottage seemed as if transfigured, as they sang the song which Ringmor afterwards learned was known among them as:

### THE SONG OF THE ROSE.

The sweetest, the fairest of roses  
I've found. Amidst thorns it reposes.  
'Tis Jesus, my one chiefest treasure,  
Of sinners a Friend above measure.

For since the sad day when frail mortals  
Were thrust out from Eden's bright portals,  
The world has been dark, full of terror,  
And man dead in sins, lost in error.

Thorns grew and were carefully nourished,  
Where brightest of roses had flourished.—  
Forgotten God's loving direction  
To lead men to bliss and perfection.

Then mindful of promises given,  
God sends from the gardens of heaven  
A Rose, 'mongst the thorns brightly blowing,  
And freely its fragrance bestowing.

Wherever this Rose Tree is grounded,  
The kingdom of God there is founded;  
And where its sweet fragrance is wafted,  
There peace in the heart is engrafted.

The jubilant world should be voicing  
Its anthems of praise and rejoicing.  
But many there be who will never  
This beauteous Rose Tree discover.

Where thistles and tares the heart cumber,  
There all thoughts of God wane and slumber;  
The Rose, which God's people so treasure,  
Is scouted for life's empty pleasure.

Bow down in Gethsemane's garden  
With Jesus, thy soul's tender warden;  
The Rose—how it droops, seems to languish,  
Bloodstained by the dew of his anguish!

Yea, e'en to the brink of Death's river  
I'll carry the Rose with me ever.  
It's beauty, its fragrance allures me,  
Of heavenly bliss it assures me.

Dear Jesus, my heart Thou rejoicest,  
Thou changest my woes to the choicest  
Of joys; Thou consolest my spirit,  
And life e'en in death I inherit.

Though life's carking cares round me cluster,  
Though sorrows their hosts round me muster,  
Yea, e'en though my heartstrings Death sever,  
My Rose, I will lose Thee, no, never!

Sad and thoughtful, Ringmor departed from the cottage to hunt up her guests. She would much rather have stolen away into the seclusion of the park to reflect upon what she had heard, but that was, of course, out of the question. The song kept ringing in her ears as she wended her way along the familiar paths. She was finding the words of that song a newer and truer interpretation of what pietism really meant.

Strange thoughts had filled her mind as she listened to the simple song with its deep symbolical meaning. In a flash the truth was revealed to her, that these simple people knew of a rose whose wondrous beauty she had never beheld, that beneath the symbol of the rose there was a hidden meaning for which she was vainly groping. The fairest rose that had hitherto beautified her own life was her love for Uno, but this flower was not now without spot or blemish. Alas! in this

hour of soul-searching self-communing she saw, ah! how clearly, that this rose was sadly sullied, that it no longer possessed the radiance, the purity which she had prized so highly. No longer was Uno her "knight without fear and without reproach," and she—she was even less the peerless lady of her childhood's dreams. —

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When Ringmor found her company comfortably settled on settees in a leafy arbor, they at once began to shower her with questions.

"How could you be so cruel as to stay so long?" asked Captain Hall in a tone of bantering reproach. "We have waited more than an hour for you."

"Pardon me!" cried Ringmor, "I did not realize that I had stayed so long, and I hoped that Uno would play the host, so that my absence would not be noticed."

"Do tell us all about the meeting, Ringmor," pleaded one of the young ladies.

"O, I can't!" was Ringmor's quick response. Then as if thinking better of it, she continued: "This much I can tell you, that a plain man of the people preached an excellent sermon, after which the assembly sang a quaint and touching song."

Just as she was speaking, the last verse of the song again rang out upon the stillness of the night. The clear, silvery tones of a woman's voice were wafted to the company in the arbor, whose attention and interest were involuntarily arrested by the sweet cadence of words and melody:

"Though life's carking cares round me cluster,  
Though sorrows their hosts round me muster,  
Yea, e'en though my heartstrings Death sever,  
My Rose, I will lose Thee, no, never!"

There was the utter abandon of joy and exultation in the voice of the unknown singer. One, at least, of the listeners felt that the singer was being lifted high above the dross of life, and that she could willingly renounce all life's pleasures to possess as her very own the rose she had found. Over each and all of them stole a conviction, much against their will, that they were poor and miserable, indeed, not to have discovered and claimed this priceless rose. A strange, inexplicable rapport exists between the souls of high and low, when spiritual winds are stirring: a single word, a cadence of the simplest song may serve to set aglow the most callous and unresponsive of hearts.

But Uno was the first to shake off the impression which threatened to throw its magic spell over those who sat listening with bated breath in the arbor.

"I can't understand," he exclaimed irritably, "how these people dare to make so much noise in passing through the park at this time of the night!"

"That kitchen maid must have been fired to unusual zeal by the preacher," sneered Captain Hall, "she fairly bubbles over with ardor."

But the young lady who had voiced her fears of the contagious power of pietism had tears in her eyes as she said, more to herself than to the others: "I can never, never forget that song! I wonder who the singer is? I have never heard a voice that affected me so strangely."

The other young lady, who had also been moved by the song, exclaimed: "What a pretty melody it was, and how well the words suited it!"

As they walked leisurely through the park up to the manor house, Ringmor was thinking that the words and music of this song was just what she had long been

seeking to complete her collection of folk songs, and she determined to procure it. All the other songs that she knew touched only the surface of the emotional life of the people, but this one sounded the depths of all that was most beautiful and noble in their sturdy character. For a hundred years and more, she mused, pious and learned men had done their utmost to enrich the people with grand and noble psalms. Now, suddenly, a song had sprung forth as from the very heart of this people; other songs would doubtless follow, and before long the stately solemnity of the psalm and the emotional ardor of the religious song would react upon each other to give a fuller expression to the religious hopes and aspirations of the nation at large.





## VII.

Stirring, indeed, were the times that followed.

"The people of the parish seem to have gone stark mad," Mr. Skoglund protested to Baron von Stedt, "and the servants at Mountain Oaks are the worst of the lot! Not only does that old dotard, Mats, run his legs off night after night to attend these pietistic gatherings, but he must force drag Mrs. Strand and her kitchen maid with him. And now, to cap the climax, all the servants of barnyard and field are beginning to walk about in hang-dog fashion, and of the renters on the estate not one remains in full possession of what little sense he once had!"

The baron was in his worst humor that day. He had been at Birgerhouse the day before, and there he had been forced to listen for an unconscionable time to the pleadings of Ringmor, who had felt it her duty to reason with him.

"My dearest Uno," she had said in conclusion, "it will never do for either of us to live the thoughtless life we do. O, Uno, you can never know how much

I long to live a good and pure life, but the more I strive for this, the more I seem to fall short of it!"

Tears were in her eyes as she spoke, and Uno was filled with real concern for her. What if she were already seized with the epidemic of pietism, so prevalent in the parish? He was wise enough not to mention his fears to Ringmor, but as he was taking his leave, he found opportunity to speak a word of warning in private to the count: "I fear that Ringmor is suffering from religious exaltation. I hope that you are not letting her attend these pietistic meetings, Uncle Heine?"

But the count had answered him with haughty reserve: "I trust my daughter implicitly as to all her words and actions. I wish that I could say as much of you."

That was all the satisfaction Uno obtained for his meddling.

No wonder, then, that he was incensed to hear of the condition of affairs on his estate.

"How can you permit my people to engage in this tomfoolery?" he raged. "Why didn't you forbid these pietistic meetings at Mountain Oaks from the start?"

"I did consult you in the matter some time ago," declared the steward incisively. "At that time it was only old Mats who caused trouble by running about preaching, and you promised, if you remember, to put a damper on his enthusiasm. If my advice had been heeded, Mats would have been incontinently dismissed, and we would be spared the plague of having the estate overrun with half-witted religious cranks."

"But Mats promised me to quit his preaching", protested the baron, "and I have no reason to believe that he has broken his promise."

"Oh, he did quit his preaching, to be sure," admitted

the steward, "but he goes about with such a sanctimonious air that it makes one sick to see him. And the people consider him an angel from heaven, the very sight of whom is uplifting and edifying to them."

Baron von Stedt paced the floor with quick, impetuous strides. He was wholly at a loss what to do. He was not so much concerned about his own dependents at Mountain Oaks—they might become visionaries and dreamers if they so desired—but what did concern him was the fear that Ringmor might in some mysterious way be affected by this pietistic movement and thus be drawn away from him.

"What is there to do?" he snapped, coming to a sudden halt before the steward.

"I have thought and thought upon the matter, until I am sick and tired," replied Mr. Skoglund disconsolately. "To dismiss the people from our service would be of small avail, for those who would come in their stead would soon be as great bedlamites as those we now have. So far as I can see, there is but one thing to do—"

"And what is that?" interrupted Uno.

"All these pietistic meetings should be absolutely prohibited in the parish," replied the steward with emphasis. "If Dean Linder could be made to exercise his authority in the matter, the people would soon become as quiet and peaceable as of old."

The young baron did not seem altogether pleased with this solution of the problem.

"I don't believe that the dean can be prevailed upon to take any decisive action in the matter," he declared.

"But I do," was the steward's positive rejoinder, and forthwith he began to unfold his plans to his young

master with the result that the latter was soon convinced of the feasability of the undertaking.

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Shortly thereafter Dean Linder received an unexpected visit from Baron von Stedt.

If it must be confessed, the dean had of late been filled with sore misgivings as to conditions in his parish. Disquieting rumors had reached him through the medium of his wife, who seemed to know not only what was happening, but what was likely to happen, and who was not slow to impart the intelligence to her husband. Wonderful things she had to relate. A young man, bedridden from childhood, had been converted, and had at once arisen from his bed of sickness to become the support and mainstay of his destitute parents. Another young man had dreamed that he would die within the week, and had in consequence been plunged into the depths of despair. But when he had come to put his trust and faith in God, he had been enabled to await the last day of his life with Christian fortitude, and he had actually died within the time foretold in his dream. Lifelong enemies had been reconciled, debts of long standing had been paid, and several young people declared that they had caught a glimpse of the celestial glory through the open gates of heaven. A stirring and miraculous time, indeed, in the parish, the like of which had never been heard before!

As a result of all this the learned dean was losing interest in his research into the Semitic languages; his very study, so dear to him, seemed narrow and stuffy, and for days at a time he would tramp heavily through the rooms of the house from one end to the other. He

expected, yet feared, that the members of his flock would seek his help and counsel in times so full of shifting winds and cross currents. What more natural than that those poor souls, who had been lured into the error of pietism, should come to him as their spiritual adviser? But when day after day passed and no one came, the dean seethed with injured pride and resentment, for who was better fitted than he to pour oil upon the troubled waters and pilot these storm-tossed souls back into the secure haven of the Church? But on the other hand, he was far from certain just what to do or say in the event that his help and advice should be sought. Though he did not realize and would never have admitted it, he was in the same quandary as the Pharisees whom Jesus asked if John's baptism was from heaven or from men. Of them it is said: "And they reasoned with themselves, saying: 'If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why, then, did ye not believe? But should we say, From men'—they feared the people, for all verily held John to be a prophet."

A further disturbing thought occurred to the dean: If his spiritual advice should actually be sought by anyone, the question as to these troublesome itinerant preachers was sure to be raised, and he really did not know what judgment to pass on their labors. As for himself, he was inclined to rank these revivalists among the false shepherds of whom the Saviour speaks. But it would never do for him to declare this openly.

But no anxious parishioners came to seek his aid; in their stead came Baron von Stedt.

The distinguished guest was at once conducted to the drawing-room, where he had to wait only a short time before the worthy dean put in an appearance. With his

well-known antipathy for the military, the dean had never entertained any high regard for the young lieutenant, but to-day he was in a mood to think it a pity that so fine a young man should be condemned to lead the degrading life of the army.

"I have come to consult you about this pietistic movement," began the baron without any attempt to beat about the bush. "Something must be done to check this evil before all our people lose what sense remains to them."

Dean Linder assumed a diplomatic air. He realized that he must hold his own views in reserve, until he could discover what were the underlying motives of the baron, and whether he was speaking for himself alone, or was acting as the spokesman of others.

"To check this movement may not be so easy as you think, my dear baron," he replied, "besides there are many things to consider before taking such a step. Even if I should desire to interfere, there is little I could accomplish, standing alone, as I do, in the midst of this religious upheaval."

"O, you are not alone, I beg to assure you," declared the baron emphatically. "There will be many to stand by you. You can count on the moral and material support of all the cultured people in the parish."

At these words Dean Linder's thin features contracted into a sardonic smile.

"My dear baron!" he exclaimed, "in all my years of labor here I have never been able to count on the support, moral or otherwise, of the cultured people in the parish. In aims and interests they have long since severed their connection with the Church, and only here and there can one be found who still retains an out-

ward semblance of respect for the worship of God. When the common people now are doing likewise, they are only following the high example they have had before their eyes."

Though Baron von Stedt felt the thrust, he did not wince, but took it in good part. Secretly he felt that he and the rest of his class were well within their rights to turn their backs on the Church, for it had never meant anything to them except as a means of holding the common herd in check. Church going, he recognized, was far better for the people than attending revival meetings, for the former was never attended by such violent social disturbances as had followed in the train of the latter.

"I acknowledge," he replied "that the gentry of this community have not been as devoted to the Church as you could reasonably expect, but I assure your Reverence that in this matter you can count on our unqualified support in any effort you are willing to make. We do not begrudge our people their religion; on the contrary, we are eager and anxious to have them attend church, but we cannot and will not put up with these pietistic meetings, where our dependents are so worked up by religious enthusiasts that they become shiftless and careless as to their duties."

"Your words are a source of joy to me, old and worn as I am," the dean replied with assumed meekness. "I regret, however, that the men of culture in my parish did not tender me their hearty support while I still possessed enough strength and vigor to take decisive action in a measure of this kind. Now, I fear, it is too late. This religious movement or fanaticism, call it what you will, has assumed such proportions

that it will be difficult if not impossible to check it. The thought has recurred to me again and again of late, that when itinerant revivalists begin to occupy the pulpits of the clergy, as has already happened, then will the middle and lower classes of the people sit in the seats of counts and barons. The day of plebeians and commoners seems to be at hand."

"Ho, ho, my dear dean! What idle vaporizing is this!" laughed the lieutenant with supreme unconcern. "I have no manner of doubt that your position in the pulpit is just as secure as ours on our estates. But you are right in this, that we must wake up and be on our guard, and it remains for you, Reverend Sir, to take the initiative. You must exercise your authority and forbid all these meetings in the parish."

Dean Linder remained silent. More than once he had been on the point of doing what the baron was now proposing to him, but he had never been able to summon sufficient energy and resolution for such drastic measures. But this irresolution of his he had excused on the ground that it would be an evidence of weakness on the part of the Church to resort to such an expedient. For though the Church seemed weak, though her power over the hearts of men seemed waning, he could never bring himself to believe that this was really so.

He started up and began to pace slowly back and forth across the floor, wholly at a loss as to what he should do. Unaccustomed as he was to the practical affairs of life, he shrank involuntarily from the demands on him for determined action. Oh, how he yearned to escape from the world's turmoil to the peace and quiet of his study, where he could commune un-

disturbed with the master spirits of antiquity, who lived when men still found time to think clearly and deeply on the various phenomena of life!

"You must intervene in this matter," cried the baron growing more and more excited; "the welfare of both Church and State demand it of you. Where will it all end if ignorant fanatics are to assume the leadership throughout our beloved country? The very thought calls loud for immediate and decided action!"

The truth, the dire truth of the baron's words was borne in upon the mind of the distracted churchman. He shuddered to think of the awful consequences of such a state of affairs. Then, surely, the knowledge of his beloved Hebrew would wane and perish throughout the land, a loss so irreparable that his heart stood still at the very thought of it. Banish the thought! His ebbing courage surged with ever swelling tide on tide back to his heart. He would stand forth as the chosen champion of Church and State to fight victoriously their battles against the encroachment of ignorance and barbarism! In this moment of supreme exaltation the precious heritage of antiquity was his to have and to hold against whatever force could be brought to bear upon it.—

Baron von Stedt took his departure from the deancry with the highest of hopes and expectations. He felt that he had succeeded in arousing the dean to a sense of his duty. These insane pietistic meetings would be inhibited, and the people, deprived of the opportunity of keeping alive the flame of fanaticism, would soon return to their senses and resume the even tenor of their way.

When Dean Linder had sped the baron on his way

and had returned to his study, his courage began to desert him by leaps and bounds, and the old spirit of vacillation and inaction laid hold on him. The time for action had not come; he would await further developments. Just now to forbid absolutely the holding of religious meetings would be to expose himself to an odium which he little relished. The revivalists would naturally spread the report broadcast and would pose as martyrs in the eyes of the people, while he would be painted in the darkest colors as an autoerat and a despot. Gladly would he have championed the cause of culture and religion, but not in the way proposed by the baron. To interfere openly was beyond his strength and courage.

This settled, was there not some other way to accomplish the desired end, some other person to wield the weapon he was unwilling and impotent to handle? For a long time he cast about in his mind for a way out of the dilemma until, at last, a happy thought occurred to him. So far as he knew these meetings had all been held in the gardener's cottage at Birgerhouse. What was to hinder, then, that Colonel Heine himself should exercise his authority in prohibiting these religious gatherings? Greatly relieved at this solution of the difficult problem, the dean prepared to act upon it at once.

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Dean Linder came riding at an easy, leisurely pace behind a span of sleek, fat blacks, so rotund and ponderous from good living that they could hardly move. When the equipage drew up before the main entrance of Birgerhouse, the count was already at the door to welcome his guest, and a servant stood ready to open

the carriage door and receive the voluminous wraps which the thoughtful Mrs. Linder had provided against drafts and colds. What though a bright summer sun was flooding the earth with genial warmth; both the dean and his estimable wife were firm believers in the proverb that "discretion is the better part of valor."

"Your Reverence's horses are altogether too fat," protested the colonel, after the customary greetings had been exchanged and they had settled themselves comfortably in the drawing room. "You feed them too much and give them too little exercise."

"So much the surer am I that they will not run away," the dean retorted with a weak attempt at pleasantry. "I don't approve of fast driving and am well content with my gentle, well-mannered blacks."

"You speak true," replied the count laughing, "they are not likely to bolt upon the first provocation, fat and unwieldy as they are. But really, my dear dean, you are feeding them too much and not giving them enough exercise. Take my advice, and let them work in the field or do some heavy hauling at least every other day. As it is, you are ruining them completely."

It was a matter of common report that the dean was exceedingly careful of his favorite blacks, and that he would under no circumstances permit them to haul any heavier load than himself and the carriage in which he made his rounds in the parish. It was therefore out of the question that he should alter his practice in this respect because of the extravagant notions of Count Heine; not even the thought that his pets might be suffering from inaction could prevail upon him to do this. Perish the thought that he should, out of consideration for the colonel's opinion, submit his dearly

loved carriage horses to the indignity of common draft animals. The very thought of it caused him pain.

"With your permission, Count Heine, I will state my errand," said the dean, avoiding a direct reply. "I have a matter of importance to discuss with you."

"You may speak freely," the count assured him. "I am interested to learn to what I owe the honor and the pleasure of this unexpected visit."

The fact was that the dean seldom made a call on any of his parishioners without being directly summoned or invited.

"So many duties claim my time and attention, much to my regret, that I have small leisure for making calls," the dean replied. "But to-day, as I have already intimated, a matter of special importance brings me here."

During his leisurely journey to Birgerhouse the dean had carefully considered what he should say to the count, but the latter's remark on the infrequency of his visits had so frustrated him that he forgot the ornate introduction he had planned and could only make a plain statement of his errand.

"We live in strange and troubled times, your lordship," he began after having cleared his throat. "A new and dangerous religious movement is sweeping over the land and has already invaded the peaceful quiet of our own parish. Itinerant preachers are swarming everywhere, and the people, impressionable as children, are flocking to these self-appointed shepherds without a thought of the blessings and security they enjoy within the old, established order of the church, which they are leaving behind for the new and untried conditions of an unchurchly religious propaganda. Your lordship's keen sympathies with the common people are well known

to me, wherefore I have ventured to call on you to-day to learn your views as regards this new pietistic movement spreading like wildfire over the country."

"I will tell you frankly what my views are," replied the count earnestly, "but then your Reverence must promise to listen, not as an ecclesiastic but as a man, otherwise nothing that I have to say will be of any avail."

"I am accustomed to your lordship's outspoken ways," remarked the dean dryly. "I have not forgotten our conversation of last winter, and yet you see me here to-day."

"Very well then, your Reverence, I will state my views as briefly and concisely as I can. From lack of sympathy with the people and a proper understanding of their needs, the clergy have for a long time failed to supply their religious wants, the sermons going beyond the comprehension of the average mind. As a result, men have arisen from their own ranks, who have known how to give adequate expression to the irrepressible craving of the human heart for communion with God. From sacred as well as profane history we know that in times of stress and danger chosen instruments in the hands of an overruling Providence have always appeared as saviors to lead their people into brighter and happier paths. Recall, for instance, the prophets of Israel, many of them plain and simple men, who rose magnificently to the emergencies confronting them. And the disciples of our Lord, what were they but unlettered fishermen from the shores of Galilee?"

"Your lordship thinks, then, that these itinerant preachers are to be likened to the prophets of Israel, and that they are called to be the saviors of our people? That explains to me why you permit them to forgather

on your estates to hold their meetings. Under such circumstances I have nothing further to add."

The words were uttered in the dean's most chilling tone, as he arose to take his leave with a dignity of bearing befitting the highest church dignitary in the land.

But Count Heine had not yet had his say.

"No, no, my dear dean, you are misinterpreting my words!" he protested. "Please be seated and let me finish what I have to say."

There was nothing for the dean to do but yield, so he subsided again into his chair, but his whole mien showed that he had no further expectations of coming to an understanding with the count, and only common politeness kept him from taking an abrupt and uncemonious departure.

"Naturally, I did not mean," continued the count, "that these revivalists are destined to become the saviors of our people. But if their activities would open the eyes of our clergy to the crying religious needs of men of all stations, and arouse the Church to an earnest effort to satisfy this want, I think we would live to see a great national awakening."

"I regret to say that we of the clergy see no evidence of any such crying need as you speak of," remarked the dean frigidly. "Our churches are becoming more empty every Sunday."

"The pulpit is hardly the place from which to judge of the people's spiritual wants, my dear dean," replied the count, not without a trace of irony. "But get down among them, and use your eyes and ears! What are the old people doing? Reading their Bibles. What are the children doing during the intervals between work and

play? Learning their catechisms. What munificent dowry does the bride receive from her betrothed on their marriage day? A psalm book, invariably a psalm book! I have seen hundreds of young men come to the training grounds for their annual setting-up drill with little else in their packs than a psalm book. Go through the luggage brought by the servants, male or female, who come to us, and what will you find? Always some book of devotions!"

"I must say that your lordship has a rather exalted opinion of the common people," replied the dean. "I would be more inclined to accept your opinion of them, if I could see greater results in their daily lives of all this religious study and devotion."

"Yes, I entertain high, even exalted opinions of our Swedish people," Count Heine replied with ringing voice. "I fully believe that under the providence of God our nation still has a great mission to perform in working out the destiny of mankind; and the people, the common people, will be the heart and soul in this work. Their Bible reading and devotions have not been so barren of results as you think, otherwise these evangelists would not have obtained from them so eager a hearing and so ready a response."

A moment's pause ensued, during which the two antagonists seemed to be marshaling their forces for a final onslaught. The dean was the first to renew the battle: "I, too, believe that as a nation we have not yet said our last word in the international councils of the world. But just because I believe this, I view with alarm the subversive and destructive activities of these gospel-mongers. If our country's fair name and fame is to be maintained, if we are not to be blotted out from

the sisterhood of nations, we must bestir ourselves to keep alive and strengthen at all hazards the civilization and culture which is ours. But tell me, Count Heine, how can this be done, if ignorant, lowbred churls are to be allowed to assume the leadership among us?"

The colonel straightened up in his chair and twisted his gray, military mustachios nervously. He was not now at a loss for words; he knew precisely what he would say, but he paused before replying to give his words the greater effect.

"When I was young and had first joined my regiment as a second lieutenant," he began with a merry twinkle in his eye, "I considered myself a military prodigy. My head was crammed with ideas and theories which I intended to carry out. Imagine, if you can, the din and uproar, when I first began to drill the raw recruits annually called out for service with the colors! I commanded and shouted and roared myself hoarse, but my awkward squad merely stood gaping at me, as if failing to understand a word I said, though I spoke their own language. I worked and fumed and sweated, but not a bit of progress did I make; and I would, no doubt, have ended my military career in disgust right then and there, if the necessity for cooperation and mutual understanding between myself and my men had not slowly penetrated my thick head. I had gazed so fixedly on the many things my boys had to learn, that I had failed to study the learners in order to note their peculiarities of temperament. But when I began to do this, my interest in them was kindled, and I began to esteem and admire them for their many sturdy qualities, and to take a lively interest in their joys and sorrows. After that the drill went off with smoothness and precision.

Since that time I have taught hundreds, nay, thousands, the drill manual, and at the same time I have tried to impart to them my own love for the fatherland; but more, far more, than I have taught them, they have taught me, and they have benefited me infinitely more than I have been able to be of benefit to them.

In some such way, I was hoping, a cooperation and understanding might be brought about between the clergy and their parishioners for the mutual benefit of both. And this I venture to say, that if such a desirable state of affairs is not soon effected, the steadily widening rift between clergy and parish will grow into an impassable gulf."

But this was too much for the dean. He had heard enough and rose to depart.

"I fear that nothing would be gained by prolonging our conversation," he remarked icily. "Even your lordship must admit that there is a wide distinction between drilling raw recruits and exercising the high functions of a dean in the Church of Sweden."

"Yes, there is a difference," admitted Count Heine, also rising to take leave of his guest, "but I can't help wondering if it is as great as your Reverence imagines."

To this there was no response. Instead the dean sprung a parting question upon the count, by which he hoped to subdue and silence him completely.

"Is your lordship aware that it is a violation of the law of the land for you to permit these meetings at the cottage of your gardener? I can at will inhibit them and start legal action against all the parties concerned."

"Yes, I am aware of that," observed the count coolly, "and further, I am aware of the fact that some of you men of the cloth have already availed yourselves of this

right. But allow me to say that these are far from being as wise as Gamaliel, who once spoke warningly: 'Refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.'

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Mr. Skoglund was highly elated, when he saw the Baron von Stedt start off for the deanery. Of late he had fussed and fumed and often burst into open tirade against the presumptuous godliness springing up on all sides, while in his soul a nameless dread, of which he could not rid himself, had haunted him day and night. Wherever he went, the common talk was all of revivals and wonderful conversions; and when he laughed contemptuously at all this and scouted the miraculous tales reported to him, he was kindly admonished not to harden his heart, lest he bring upon himself dire consequences both for time and eternity.

"I believe neither in God nor in eternity," he declared, "nor, for that matter, does any sensible man nowadays."

But for some reason he found it increasingly difficult to maintain his avowed skepticism. Some hidden power impelled him, even against his reason, to a reluctant conviction that there was a God and a hereafter, and no amount of specious arguing on his part could dispel the fearful thought.

When he had witnessed the baron's departure, he re-entered his office to look over some accounts, but before long he was interrupted by a knock at the door. At his

imperious, "Come in!" the door was opened, and a young man entered the room.

"Good evening, Mr. Skoglund," said the newcomer pleasantly, "I suppose you fail to recognize me."

Casting a hasty glance at the intruder, the steward exclaimed irritably: "Recognize you! How can I be expected to recognize every Tom, Dick, and Harry that bobs up in the parish?"

"Of course you can't," admitted the stranger in a conciliating tone, "but you have visited my father so many times to have your measure taken for shoes that I thought that you might possibly know me. I am George, the son of the parish shoemaker."

But by this time the steward knew who he was, despite the surprising change in him. Of course it was George, the shoemaker's son, bedridden from childhood, who had never known the happiness of health and strength. For years he had lain on his miserable cot in the wretched little hut of the shoemaker. For years he had been nothing but a burden to himself and to those nearest him. It is not surprising, then, if he at last began to cry out bitterly against the injustice of Heaven. From much brooding over all the woe and misery in the world, his dark, luminous eyes had taken on the haunted look of one who can see things unseen and mysterious. He had seen his father sink deep into the mire of intemperance; he had seen his mother succumb under the strain of constant worry and drudgery; he had seen his brothers and sisters forced in tender years to shift for themselves. And all the while, with gritted teeth and clenched hands, he had cursed the fate which bound him to his bed of suffering. Oh, that he were as others of equal age and station; then there would be no need for his mother

to slave herself into a premature grave for him and those dependent on her. Such were his thoughts in his brighter and better moments. But when the darkness of despair closed in upon his soul, he wished for health and strength only to revel in evil doing, that he might avenge upon others the sufferings he had endured.

But here stood George, hale and hearty, in the presence of the steward, who stared at him as though he were an apparition. Now that he thought of it, the steward remembered that he had heard some strange tale of a miracle wrought upon the shoemaker's son, but he had given little credence to the report. Now, however, the evidence of his own eyes revealed to him in a startling manner the marvelous change in the hitherto wretched invalid he had known.

"Surprising, I must say!" exclaimed Mr. Skoglund involuntarily. "How in the world did it happen?"

"That's easily explained," cried George. "It's the work of God and none other!"

The steward's only answer was a shrug of the shoulder, as if he would say that it was all very well for a shoemaker's son to believe in such things as miracles, but that he, an educated man, could not be expected to put faith in such idle talk. So he leaned back comfortably in his chair to listen to the young man's tale, a smile of superiority and disdain playing about his mouth. He did not even ask George to sit down, being interested to see if the invalid really had the strength to remain standing.

"Yes, it was and is the work of God!" repeated George fervently. "I confess, to my shame and sorrow, that during all my years of suffering I have given no thought to God except to curse him with hideous oaths, when

my poor body was racked with torture, and my mind seethed with dark, rebellious thoughts against the cruel injustice of his dealings with me. Then strange rumors of revival meetings and miraculous conversions began to reach me, serving only to increase my torment. For to my physical sufferings was added an indescribable mental anguish, which gave me no rest by night or day. I could see how my groans were as whiplashes on the back of my mother, but this did not silence me; in my agony I even gloated on the pain and distress I caused her.

One evening, when my father had left the house to buy some whisky with the last few cents we had, while I lay there wailing and moaning as usual, my mother snatched up her kerchief, exclaiming: 'I can stand this no longer! Now I must go, and may God have mercy on us all!'

The first effect of her words was to silence me, but at the mention of the name of God I burst into mocking laughter.

Hours passed while I lay there all alone tossing upon my wretched cot. Finally father came home, drunk and quarrelsome, but he soon tumbled into his bed and fell asleep. But my mother did not return. I lay there, straining to catch the well-known sound of her footsteps, but no such sound was heard. I forgot my sufferings as a nameless dread laid hold on my soul: What if mother would never return? The fearful thought wrung from my heart again and again her parting words: 'May God have mercy on us all!'

Then to my intense relief I heard my mother's approaching steps, and soon she entered the room. A thrill of mingled pain and happiness shot through me, when she approached my bed. Feigning sleep, though I

had never been more awake in my life, I lay with half shut eyes closely observing her every motion. Thinking me asleep, she knelt by my side, a thing she had never done before, and I heard her whispered prayer repeated over and over: 'God have merey, have merey on us!' I can't say how many times she repeated this agonizing ery, but suddenly she ceased and lay silent for some time. When she spoke again, there was a ring of triumph in her tone: 'Yea, Lord, thou wilt have mercy; I do believe thou wilt have mercy on us!'

Then she arose. There was a new look in her eye; her shrunken frame was more erect. She seemed so tall and stately that I felt instinctively that a wonderful change had taken place in her.

Next morning, as usual, mother was the first to be up and astir. I lay watching her as she busied herself about the room. The change in expression and bearing which I had noticed in her the previous evening now seemed more striking than before.

But when father awoke, trouble began.

'Where were you last night, I should like to know,' he roared, as soon as he was fully awake.

'I was at the revival meeting,' she replied calmly.

'What business had you at the revival meeting?' he asked, growing more excited. 'You know I can't stand such nonsense.'

'But I was so sad and—'

'Sad and fiddlestieks!' he shouted, 'ill-humored and lazy is nearer the truth. Perhaps you intend to become a pietist also?'

Mother, who was sweeping the floor, stopped suddenly as if to ponder the question. Then coming to a quiet

resolve, she exclaimed: 'O father, father! I am so happy—so happy! I have found peace with God!'

Her eyes shone with a supernatural light that thrilled and awed me. And yet I felt at this moment that I had long been waiting for just such words, for just such a wonderful change in my mother.

But father was enraged and quarreled incessantly for days thereafter. He absolutely forbade her to attend more meetings, and I think that she obeyed him. But she read her Bible as often as she had a spare moment, and by night she spent hour after hour on her knees in prayer. Her attitude toward me also took a decided turn for the better. She became more kind and patient in bearing with my constant complaints, and there was a new gentleness and care in her ministrations upon my many wants. When she occasionally ventured to lay her cool hand upon my fevered brow, a peace and calm crept over me that I had never felt before.

About this time a new customer came to my father. He was a man who had seen much of the world, and he was only making a short stay in the parish. Observing me lying on my cot in a corner of the room, he came over to my side and began to ask me questions. Finally he said: 'My poor boy, I think there is a chance for you to get well, if you could only take treatments for a time at some watering place. But that, of course, is expensive.'

I marked the sudden gleam in mother's eye and felt the first ray of hope shoot into my own darkened soul.

'Watering places are not to be thought of by poor folks such as we,' my father replied harshly. 'We must be content to drag out our lives at any price.'

My faint hope flickered and died as the stranger re-

plied: 'Yes, I suppose you are right. But it's a pity, for the baths, the sun, and the air would be sure to work miracles with your son.'

I can't tell you how his words kept ringing in my ears and reechoing in my very soul, and I could see that mother also was thinking of them. Sunshine and fresh air! Oh, how I longed for the boon of these precious gifts! But they were not for me; for my mother was not strong enough to carry me out of doors, and father would not think of troubling himself with labor so unnecessary and useless.

Then I began to pray: 'If it be true that Thou art God, and that Thou art almighty, then do Thou furnish me with enough money to take a course of treatments at some watering place!' So I cried, and all the while my fancy pictured the joy, the unutterable joy of such an experience.

But days merged into weeks, and no money was forthcoming.

'There is no God!' I cried in despair one day in my mother's hearing.

'Oh, yes, there is, my boy!' she exclaimed, and then continued meaningly, as she laid the Bible beside me: 'It will be worth your while to seek him earnestly.'

But my only answer was a scornful laugh, and day by day the Bible lay untouched by my side. Then one afternoon, when I was alone in the house, and my despairing thoughts would give me no rest, I picked up the book to divert my mind.

And what do you think I hit upon? Why, the story of the lame man who lay by the pool of Bethesda waiting for its waters to be troubled, and who for eight and thirty years had vainly been longing for health! Oh, how

I wished that I had been that man! Oh, that I had been the sufferer by whose wretched pallet Jesus of Nazareth stopped on that memorable day! There was a striking similarity between me and the lame man at Bethesda. He could find health in its healing waters; I, in the life-giving waters of the springs, and in the air and sunshine of an outdoor life. And in the case of both there was none to supply the boon.

Just as I lay there reading the marvelous story, mother entered. Her face lit up with sudden joy, when she saw me reading the Bible, but for some unaccountable reason this angered me, and I threw the book aside, exclaiming: 'If there is a God, why does he not manifest his goodness and mercy to all alike?'

'O, he does, he does!' my mother cried. 'His goodness and mercy are boundless!'

'Nothing of the kind!' I raved, utterly beside myself from grief and disappointment. 'If what you say is true, why does he not cure me, as he did the lame man at the pool of Bethesda?'

'When your hour strikes, you will be made whole,' my mother declared with such an air of conviction that I could not doubt her word. 'It is written that whom he smiteth, his loving hand also maketh whole.'

That night I could not sleep a wink. My poor body was wrenching and racked by torments that threatened to end my miserable life. My very soul seemed a battle ground of unseen powers, whose strife caused me woe unutterable. The chill and the pallor of death were on my brow, while my aching limbs were consumed with burning fever. Neither did my mother sleep that night. She lay on her knees beside my bed throughout the night in silent prayer. I am unable to say whether I fell

asleep at last, or went completely out of my head, but this I know, that the glorious presence of the Great Healer appeared to me; entered our humble cottage; strode slowly up to my bedside and put the same question to me as to the lame man at the pool of Bethesda: 'Wouldst thou be made whole?'

It seemed to me that I answered him: 'I have not asked for health; only for the opportunity to reach a watering place; but, alas, my prayer was not answered!'

Then I heard him say: "Arise, take up thy bed and walk!" Upon the word he vanished from my sight, and left with me only the vivid memory of his presence and the increasing pangs of bodily suffering.

My reason told me that it was all only a dream, and that the words I had heard were not intended for me at all, but for some chosen few, for the elect. But the cadence of those words kept repeating itself endlessly within me: 'Arise, take up thy bed and walk!' Mingled with these, my mother's words were ringing in my soul: 'His goodness and mercy are boundless,' until, at last, a tiny spark of faith was kindled, and I could say to myself: 'Perhaps, after all, Jesus, the Great Healer, is saying to you now, Arise, and walk! Perhaps your travail of mind and body is but the beginning of a new birth for both!'

As if to confirm and strengthen my newborn faith, the sun was shining bright and clear the next morning.

'Dress me, mother!' I cried, as soon as father had left the room.

She did not look at all surprised, made no objections, but without a word did as I bade her. As she clothed me in the old and worn garments of my father, her eyes brimmed and overflowed with tears.

'Are you sad, mother?' I asked, perplexed at her tears.  
'No, no, my boy,' she sobbed, 'I'm glad, so glad!'

Her voice quivered with emotion. With a throb of joy almost painful in its intensity, I felt that she was expecting something wonderful to happen. Our humble home was filled as with the solemnity of the house of God, when the dean intones the sacred words of the mass: '*Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.*' The dawning light of a new day was slowly dissipating the darkness in my soul, and over its deeps of misery and woe the Spirit of God seemed to hover benignly. Then all in a flash I knew with absolute certainty that I would walk, that I would get well, and that the great change I had seen in mother would come to me—the vistas of a new, rich, and beautiful world were quickly opening to my sight!"

As he spoke, the young man's eyes grew brighter and brighter as though reflecting the increasing divine light from above. He had been lifted to a state of exaltation by his own narrative. It was necessary for him to pause, that he might collect his thoughts for the telling of the dramatic sequel to his wonderful tale.

"Mr. Skoglund," he resumed, "you are perhaps growing tired of my story, but I am soon through. To me who had not for many years been able to rest my weight upon my legs, it was a queer sensation, indeed, to find myself teetering unsteadily on my feet, and even venturing to step out across the floor leaning heavily on mother's arm. But with the certainty in my heart that I would succeed, and the tempting sunshine beckoning through the open door, nothing seemed impossible. I reached the door at last, panting and ready to drop with fatigue, but happy and triumphant as a conqueror. Oh,

sir, how can I describe to you my feelings as I sat out there on the sunny side of the house, reveling in the genial warmth of the summer sun, feasting my eyes on the nearby forest, and drinking in the glorious air of all outdoors!

My whole life was changed as if by magic. Gone and forgotten were all the dark years of suffering and woe, a mighty wave of gratitude swept in upon my soul, and with joy unspeakable I poured out my heart in praise to God—first for the new-found strength flowing ever stronger within me, but this feeling was soon swallowed up by the greater, transcendent joy I felt in the knowledge that there is a God, a God so glorious that the merest glimpse of his glory is enough to flood the world with beauty, a God so great, and yet so full of loving-kindness that he in mercy remembered me, even me!

As I sat there gazing upon the wonders of nature, with all my senses alert to catch the joy and gladness of it all, I became more and more convinced that God is good. Every bird was twittering his praise; every flower bore testimony of the wonder of his works; every incense laden breeze, wafted to me from the forest, proclaimed his love divine.—

I grew stronger day by day. Gradually I began to walk about unaided, first a few steps only, then slowly increasing the length of my excursions, until I could walk down to the lake, where daily baths hastened my complete restoration to health and strength. It was all so great and wonderful! But greater far the knowledge that the Lord who had spoken his omnipotent 'Arise!' to me was still speaking lovingly to my heart. I could feel his presence, could prostrate myself at his feet in prayer and thanksgiving, could hear his voice say to me

in accents low and tender, but full of solemn warning: ‘Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee.’ ”

The steward had been so impressed by George’s narrative that he had never once thought of interrupting it. And now that it was ended, the conviction was strong upon him that he must choose between one of two ways: either he must permit the God of the pietists to take possession of his heart and rule his life, or he must determine to walk steadily onward in the path he had marked out for himself. There was many a struggle between the powers of light and darkness in the hearts of men these days, but not all ended as did the struggle in the heart of George, the shoemaker’s son.

“A strange tale and a remarkable cure!” exclaimed the steward as George concluded his story. “It is more than likely, however, that your complaint will return when cold weather sets in. Summer always brings relief in cases of your kind.”

“But God is just as powerful in winter as in summer,” cried George. “He is abundantly able to preserve the health and strength he has given me!”

“Do you believe, then, that you will never again be sick?”

“Oh, no!” replied George. “He who gave me health may take it away, but that greater gift he gave me is mine for time and eternity.”

“And what gift is that?” inquired Mr. Skoglund with mingled curiosity and scorn.

“That gift is Jesus Christ,” replied George solemnly.

Now the steward had heard enough of such idle chatter, so he turned upon George and inquired tersely: “What do you want of me, young man? You haven’t

come, I suppose, merely to tell me your extravagant tale?"

"No, sir," George replied. "I have come to inquire if you have any work for me."

Unconsciously George had brought the steward face to face with the greatest crisis of his life. Clear as day Mr. Skoglund recognized the truth that his whole future would be shaped by his reply to George's request for work. Hotly the battle raged within him; plainly he saw that a higher power had sent the young man to him. The opportunity was his, as never before, to enter into this new, mysterious world of faith, whose portals, these latter days, seemed to be flung wide for all who wished to enter. He even thought that he could catch a glimpse of the glory within, and this attracted him strangely; for something in the depths of his soul made him yearn to enter into that higher and brighter life of communion and fellowship with God. But then again, there were so many things to make him hesitate, to keep him back; and chief among these was the fact that, as yet, no person of quality had been reached by this religious awakening, but only the common people, among whom he no longer classed himself.

But despite this fact, he was unable for some time to come to a decision. A simple, insignificant circumstance at last decided his fate. Looking up, his gaze happened to fall on the broad acres of Mountain Oaks with its fertile fields and smiling meadows, and the voice of the Tempter whispered in his ear as often before: "All this is yours to have and to hold, if you manage your affairs shrewdly. Within a few years you, and not the baron, will be the master of Mountain Oaks."

In a flash it was perfectly clear to him what his answer should be.

"No, I have no work for you. There are already too many pietists in my employ."

The thought flashed through his mind that his words had closed forever the bright portals through which he had gazed longingly. Something within him cried out in agony at the thought, but in the end his baser nature triumphed.

George stared at him in blank amazement. He could hardly believe that he had heard aright.

"Don't you hear what I say? I have no work for you," the steward repeated in a harsh, offensive tone. "I have no use for canting pietists. Is that plain enough?"

The shoemaker's son looked upon the high and mighty steward with an expression at once calm and dignified. Then he opened the door to take his leave, but before he turned to go, he faced the angry steward and repeated with touching pathos the Saviour's warning words: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Then he said farewell and bowed himself out of the room.

Rich beyond the dream of avarice was he who left; poor beyond description, he who remained.





## VIII.

Within the soul of Mrs. Strand a fierce battle had been waged, before the dawning light of hope dispelled the gloom and darkness within. She had lost sight of her own precarious situation in her anxiety for the welfare of her daughter. For Edith she prayed incessantly to God, but as for herself, she had given no thought to the peril of her own soul.

But by slow degrees she had come to see that her daughter's waywardness was but a natural result of her own youthful indiscretion, and that the fearful temptation now besetting her child had its origin in her own great sin and fall. She alone was the cause of her daughter's leanings toward a life of shame. A righteous God was visiting the iniquities of the parent upon the child.

And so it was a long, weary time before Mrs. Strand could embrace the divine promises which her old friend Mats was so assiduously repeating to her. She seemed to have no comprehension of such words as grace and

forgiveness, nor any need of a Saviour to deliver her from the bondage of sin, though she realized that she had sinned grievously, and that the wrath of God rested upon her. But this wrath she feared not so much for herself as for the child she wished to save and shield with her very life.

But there came a day, a memorable day, when her eyes were opened and she saw not only that her sins were as scarlet and greater than she had ever conceived them, but also that for all her sins she might obtain forgiveness, full and free, through Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ! How precious that name became to her! When an accusing conscience troubled her, she found in that precious name a haven of refuge, to which she could flee for rest and peace to the soul. The God whom she had thought so distant in former days, who seemed so fearfully near in those dark days of anguish when the full extent of her sin and guilt was revealed to her, that God was to her no longer the stern, unyielding judge, he had become a loving Father, whose delight it was to see his child walk in the light of his countenance.

Others were loud in their praises of this or that evangelist; she had words of praise only for the Good Shepherd who had lovingly sought and found her, when she had strayed afar. It is true that he had made use of human instruments even in bringing her back to the fold, but she lost sight of these completely in contemplating the divine love which had made possible her soul's salvation.

When the great peace at last had entered her soul, she started forth to visit her daughter. Not before her own battle had been fought and victory won did she

feel that she could face her child again; for while her own guilt still weighed heavily upon her heart, she could not hope to exert any saving influence on her wayward child. But now she was strong, now she knew that God had forgiven her, that he was on her side, and "if God be for us, who can be against us?"

So Mrs. Strand proceeded on her way with quick strides and buoyant heart. Her small, shrunken form straightened out to its greatest height, and her eyes were alight with the certainty of success. For was not her daughter's temporal and spiritual welfare in the hands of God almighty?

A sudden thought dimmed her joy and caused her resolution to falter. She had read that morning that a thousand years is with the Lord as one day. What if this truth should be verified in her own special case? Not that she doubted that God would save her child—in his own good time he would not fail of this, but oh, the agony of suspense!

"Would you be willing to wait ten years, if God so demands?" she asked herself.

The question so startled her that she had to sit down by the wayside and ponder it. What if God should demand of her ten more years of mental anguish and suspense? Would she, could she bow in submission to his will?

"No, no, no!" sounded the cry from her rebellious heart. "If it be true that Thou art full of compassion, Thou must save my child without delay."

But no sooner had she given voice to this despairing cry than she repented of it. Her whole past life stood vividly before her. For her God had waited not ten

or twenty years only, but sixty years; waited with infinite patience, and she, she could not wait at all!

A deep peace and humility filled her soul, and as she rose to proceed on her way, she said to herself: "Yea, Lord, if need be, I can wait ten years. I am confident that Thou, who for sixty long years didst wait for me with never ending patience, Thou wilt surely not relax Thy watchful care of my unhappy child."

The thought cheered and strengthened her, and she quickened her pace, eager to reach the abode of her daughter. There was sunshine and happiness in her heart as she softly quavered the words of a favorite song:

"Wheresoe'er I roam through valleys dreary,  
Over mountains, or in pathless wood,  
Ever with me is a Friend to cheer me,  
Warning, comforting, as none else could.  
'Tis the Shepherd, who once dying, bleeding,  
Still through all eternity shall live;  
Following His flock, protecting, feeding,  
He the tend'rest care doth give."

But when she had finished the first stanza of the song, a sudden thought struck sadness to her heart and silenced her. How could she go singing so blithely of her own joy and happiness in communion with God, when her child, her darling Edith, was still in the outer darkness and would perhaps for years remain a stranger to the peace and happiness that God alone can give?

Again she sank down by the wayside, and, covering her eyes with her hands, she sat rocking to and fro sobbing out her anguish in prayer to God: "O God, my God, have mercy *now* on my child! I cannot, oh,

I cannot endure the thought that my little girl is to walk for years along paths that are dark and evil, when the path that leads to Thee is so bright and joyous. Smite me, O God, punish me, yea, take away the light of Thy countenance from me, but save my daughter now—now!"

She left unheeded the still, small voice within, to which under other circumstances it was her delight to listen. Its warning words were overwhelmed and silenced by her own insistent cries prompted by despairing mother love. She felt that she was in the grasp of some mighty power, but whether good or evil, she could not now say, she could only cry, could only cry to God.

"My dear Mrs. Strand, why are you sitting here weeping?" asked a gentle voice, and when she looked slowly up, she saw Mrs. Oak, the shoemaker's wife, standing close beside her.

The sight of Mrs. Oak recalled immediately to Mrs. Strand the miracle that God had wrought upon the shoemaker's son, and she replied bitterly: "It's all very well for you to go around with a smile on your face and happiness in your heart, when God has done such marvelous things with your son. But as for me, what can I do but weep when I think of my own poor, unhappy girl?"

"God will save your daughter, Mrs. Strand, you may be sure of it," declared Mrs. Oak with conviction.

But Mrs. Strand only wept as one who could not be consoled, and some time passed before she could frame an answer to the cheering words she had heard.

"Yes, I know, I know that God will save my little girl, but something tells me that there will be long, weary days of waiting for me, and I cannot endure the

thought. Every day that passes will be agony to me, and a loss, a great loss to my child."

"Yes, it is quite possible that you will have to wait," replied the other mother with gentle sympathy, "but it is just while we watch and pray, biding God's good pleasure, that his goodness and mercy grow ever greater to our sight. Gradually we come to see and understand the wonderful dealings of him who 'doeth all things well,' and as we wait upon him, we begin to realize that we are not alone, nor yet a few, but a mighty host, who are watching and waiting for him. We began by praying for the salvation of *one* soul; we end by including all humanity in our prayers, and our loving thought goes out to all for whom our blessed Saviour suffered and died. And even as our prayers rise to heaven for them, so do they plead to God for us. O Mrs. Strand, don't you begin to realize that while we are awaiting the gracious will of our heavenly Father, we learn 'to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace'?"

This was all very wonderful and grand, thought Mrs. Strand. To think that the shoemaker's wife should have grown so eloquent of late! Why, she could express herself just as well as any of the evangelists, not to mention the venerable dean himself!

"I suppose you attend the meetings regularly," remarked Mrs. Strand with studied caution. She more than suspected that the shoemaker's wife was a constant attendant at the meetings, and that her eloquence was but a lesson learned by rote and repeated parrot-like for her benefit, though, if the truth be told, there was a ring of sincerity in her every word and intonation.

"Oh, no!" she replied, "it is not often that I can at-

tend the meetings. But even when I must stay at home, I am present in spirit, and that thought cheers and comforts me. God can shower his blessings on me just as abundantly in my humble home as at the meetings, and I feel that when he manifests his gracious presence to those who are gathered in his name, he does not forget those who could not be present, for his love goes out to all who open their hearts to him."

By this time Mrs. Strand was thoroughly ashamed of her suspicions. She even felt that it would be easier for her to bide with patience while the Lord worked out his inscrutable decrees; for she was not alone, she was but one of many who waited upon a loving Father to hear and answer the pleadings of his child.

And so the mothers parted; the one to hasten on her way homeward, the other to resume her journey to the keeper's lodge, where her daughter had taken up her abode.

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The hour was late when Mrs. Strand finally knocked at the door of the keeper's lodge. Instantly the door was opened by Edith, but the mother noticed with a pang that the light of expectancy faded from her daughter's face, when the latter recognized the late visitor as her mother. Edith's disappointment was only one of many that had come to her of late. As the days passed, first one and then another of the residents in the neighborhood had visited her, either from curiosity or to bring her a trial order for laundry work, but he for whom she was waiting with such impatience remained persistently away. And though she did not know it, Baron von Stedt's absence was to be explained by the fact that he had come to realize that he had

acted hastily in advising Edith to take up her abode in the keeper's lodge.

"Aren't you out rather late, mother?" was the none too friendly greeting of the daughter. "I was hardly expecting a visit from you."

If the mother had expected a heartier welcome, she was careful to hide her disappointment.

"I had to see for myself how things are with you," she said, laying aside her outer garments. "I would have come much sooner, if I had been able."

The mother looked with interest about the room. All the arrangements, though simple, bore evidence of good taste. Mrs. Strand felt that her daughter had made use of her slender means to better advantage than she herself could have done.

"Why, how pleasant and cozy everything is!" she exclaimed admiringly.

Edith made no reply but sat down at the table in the center of the room, while her mother found a seat on a bench by the window.

Silence reigned for several minutes, Edith having nothing to say, and the mother finding it difficult to begin the story she had come to tell, when her daughter's demeanor was so cold and distant.

"Is Baron von Stedt at home?" Edith asked suddenly, as if merely wishing to break the silence. But secretly she had been thinking that his absence from home might explain his failure to visit her.

"Oh, yes, he's at home," replied Mrs. Strand, a heavy weight of anxiety falling from her as she spoke. For she understood from Edith's question that the baron had not as yet renewed his attentions to her daughter.

Again there was silence. Edith sat with bowed head, darkly brooding over her fancied wrongs.—So, the baron had been at home after all, but had not cared to call on her, had, of course, changed his mind, thinking that he could act as he pleased. A woman of her station could, of course, be picked up or cast aside at will by such a high and mighty personage as the baron. Oh, how her hot blood boiled at the thought; oh, how she longed to be revenged on him; oh, how she hated all these people of quality, who were so proud of their exalted station, and who looked down so condescendingly upon such as she! In the bitterness of wounded pride Edith quite forgot that she also had aspired to the exalted station she now reviled.

"Edith, I have something to tell you," the mother finally said in a soft, caressing tone, as she arose and took a chair by the side of her daughter.

The daughter cast a quick glance at her mother to see if she could tell by the expression in her face what the nature of her message might be. The poor, infatuated girl thought for a moment with kindly hope that her mother might be the bearer of some word from him who filled all her waking thoughts. But a single glance was enough to quench the spark of hope, for no one with a message from Lieutenant von Stedt would have an expression so saintly, so ethereal as that which now glorified her mother's countenance.

Almost in a panic, she knew not why, Edith hastened to say: "Oh, never mind, mother! I hardly think that what you have to say will interest me."

And she spoke more truly than she knew. For in her present mood she had no thought for anything that did not directly concern her own happiness. With the

selfishness of youth she entirely forgot that her mother's happiness was any concern of hers.

"But you must listen to me, child," Mrs. Strand replied with the infinite patience of a mother. "What concerns me must in the nature of things concern you also, for we belong to each other more than your youthful experience can realize."

For answer Edith only shook her head protestingly, not venturing nor caring to contradict her mother.

"You do not ask me what I have to tell," said the mother sadly, "but I will tell you anyway. O my child, I have found my God and Saviour; or rather, he has sought and found me, and the joy of it is indescribable!"

Instantly Edith was fully awake and alive to the situation. She winced as if she had received a blow, and her cheeks were mantled with a sudden flush. She had heard tell of wonderful conversions both in the city and here in the parish, but never for a moment had she thought that this fanaticism would strike so near home. She had heard her former master and mistress speak frequently of these revivals as a mental disease to which the common people were especially exposed, and she had come to share their views in this regard. It seemed to her all at once that it was so common and shabby of her mother to come and tell her that she, too, had turned fanatic, as if she were no more than the common rabble who knew no better.

"It can't be possible that you have joined the ranks of the pietists!" she exclaimed, staring gloomily at her mother. And even as she spoke, the fearful thought occurred to her that if this were so, she would indeed be alone and deserted in life. Never before had she realized how much her mother meant to her, but now

it was suddenly made plain to her that her mother had been her only haven of refuge throughout her young life. If she, too, should turn away, then her life would indeed assume a dark and precarious aspect. And if her mother really turned pietist, Edith felt that no further dependence was to be placed on her. The relations between mother and daughter would then be utterly and irretrievably changed.

"Why do you use the name pietist, child?" Mrs. Strand protested, "I can't understand how that word applies to me. For when I look upon myself, there is little of real piety in me, though, God knows, I strive to follow in the footsteps of my Lord and Saviour, and as I do so strive, the light of his presence grows ever clearer and brighter in my poor old heart. Do you know, Edith, that your poor old mother, who never in her life has been able to sing, now goes about the live-long day feebly quavering her songs of praise to God for the happiness, the great happiness that has come into her life! The gloom and darkness has vanished, and God is good, oh, so good to me!"

The forbidding frown in Edith's face grew more pronounced at her mother's words. It was perfectly plain to her now that her mother had turned pietist. This unnatural flow of words was ample proof that her head had been turned by all this preaching and praying; for Edith knew her mother to be reserved and reticent by nature.

She was on the point of making an ill-natured reply, when a second glance at the mother silenced her. How strangely altered in appearance her mother really was! It seemed to Edith that all the wrinkles and crow's-feet had disappeared, and that the sad old face she knew

so well now beamed as with the radiance of youth. What strange power had infused life and vigor into her frail little body? Then Edith remembered a saying, common among the people, to the effect that the spark of life often flares up bright and strong shortly before the end comes. What if this were the explanation in her mother's case?

The dire possibility of such an event at once banished from Edith's mind all thought of self. The hopes and ambitions she had cherished gave way to feelings of dread and anguish at the awful thought that her mother might leave her—might die.

"Mother, you must not leave me, you must not die!" she cried, hiding her eyes so as not to see the unearthly splendor in her mother's countenance. "You are welcome to be a pietist or anything else you please, but you must not leave me alone in this dark and cruel world."

Mrs. Strand was deeply touched by Edith's words and manner, for such display of affectionate regard she had not witnessed since her daughter was a little girl.

"Child! It is not so fearful a thing to die as you seem to think," Mrs. Strand replied in a gentle, soothing tone, "though I must confess that until quite recently I shared your views of death. But now I am beginning to understand, at least in part, the meaning of the words: 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, they shall rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.'"

But these words were not of a nature to quiet Edith's fears. On the contrary, they served only to confirm and increase them.

"Mother, mother, don't you hear me? You *must* not

die!" she repeated with such terror and violence that the mother at once understood the need of speaking and dealing cautiously with her child. Yes, here was need of divine wisdom and direction, lest this high-strung, sensitive soul be utterly lost to her and to God.

"My little girl," she said with maternal gentleness, "I will live so long as it pleases God, for he loves both you and me and knows how long you may have need of me on earth; and so long he will permit me to remain with you."

Somewhat quieted and cheered by these words, Edith said: "You know I need you, mother, and that I can't endure the thought of how lonely I would be without you. Let us drop this terrible subject."

Mrs. Strand took her daughter's hand in hers, and for once Edith made no resistance. In this moment her imperious nature was strangely docile and subdued.

"Child, you dread the thought of loneliness, and yet that is really what I have come to speak with you about," the mother replied after a pause during which she had been gently stroking her daughter's hand. "You see, my dear, I have been alone my whole life; all my days have I been sad and lonely except those few short days of happiness and sunshine, when I dreamed of lifelong bliss with one whom you have never seen, though he is your father. Then, when the blow fell, my life grew dark and cheerless indeed! But your coming, though counted by the world as a curse, was to me a blessing in disguise, for it helped me tide over the terrible days of anguish and despair that followed. But now, my little girl, I have come to tell you that I am no longer alone. One who loves me dearly and whose best wishes I have; one whose chief aim it is to bring about my highest

happiness is present with me always. O child, child, my life is now so beautiful and bright, so rich and full of peace and joy!"

A sudden conviction of the truth of her mother's words came home to Edith. She understood now why so many were turning pietists these days. It must be good to have one's heart filled with such happiness and peace, and she determined to seek for it herself sometime when she grew old as her mother. But for the present, in spite of disappointments, life was too full of promise for her to relinquish the pleasures that still awaited her.

"You may remain a pietist, mother," she declared with decision, "but never think that you can induce me to become one. Don't try to persuade me, mother. It's no use, I tell you!"

"I may not be able to persuade you, my child," gently replied Mrs. Strand, "but that does not trouble me, for I know of one who can and will."

Edith hastily withdrew her hand, and cast a suspicious look upon her mother. Then in her old, imperious way she exclaimed: "I hope you are not thinking of sending any of those itinerant preachers to me. Remember, mother, if you do, I will slam the door in his face."

"What if I send you one whom you will not be able to shut out!" inquired Mrs. Strand mysteriously.

"Mother!"

It was all that Edith said, but there was menace and anger in her tone. She would have none of these troublesome fanatics running about her. She hated and detested the very name of pietism, but she felt intuitively that, sooner or later, she would be drawn within its influence.

"He whom I will send to you is not a sinful man," concluded Mrs. Strand, "but the good God himself, whom I will implore to speak to your heart through his Holy Spirit. You will find it hard to close your heart to him, my child!"

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When Mrs. Strand had gone, Edith sat still for a long time, buried in deep thought. She tried to throw off the influence of the words she had heard, but could not, for they were deeply graven in her soul. The silence oppressed her. The very cottage seemed strangely altered since her mother's visit, and she had a queer sensation of not being alone, but that a something or some one was with her even now. Ringing in her ears, her mother's parting words kept repeating themselves endlessly. What if her mother's prayer was already heard, and God had sent his Spirit to speak to her!

So terrifying was the thought that, if it had not been so late, the young girl would have rushed out into the night and sought refuge with some one of the neighbors, though she had as yet formed no acquaintances among them. She had been painfully aware that they looked upon her with suspicion, and had only made an occasional call on her out of curiosity. But at this moment she would have given the world and all to have some human being to speak to. To know that you are alone and still have a weird sensation of an unseen presence, is uncanny and terrifying in the extreme.

She went over to the bureau and picked up a book which she had been reading, and which she now hoped would divert her mind. But no headway was made with her reading, as she felt impelled to look up every few

seconds to make sure that she was really alone in the room. She could not dispel the impression that some one was looking at her, some one with keen, penetrating eyes, whom she could not deceive nor dismiss from her presence.

At last she decided to go to bed. Hastily undressing, she blew out the light and crept into bed, drawing the quilt over her head, as she had done so often in childhood, when the darkness had terrified her. And now as then it seemed to help, for now that she could no longer see anything, the uncanny feeling that she was being looked at by unseen eyes was not so strong within her. But as she could not sleep, her thoughts reverted to her mother. She saw her sitting by her side at the table, and telling of the great joy that had come into her life; she saw how the mother's eyes beamed tenderly upon her at the moment of farewell and departure. And, strangely enough, Edith could even follow with her eyes the mother on her way home through the night; could see her face shining with a radiance as of heaven, and her whole form seemingly wrapped in garments of light. —

It seemed to Edith that the radiance grew ever more bright, and looking forward, she discerned the reason for this, for in the far distance she beheld a perfect blaze of splendor streaming from out the wide flung portals of the higher world. Toward these portals her mother was hastening with eager step. Her path, though mounting steeply, was straight and smooth, and was lit up by the radiance from afar.

"O mother, mother, why do you hasten so?"

So it seemed to Edith that she cried with all her strength, for she felt that once within the portals, her

mother would be lost to her sight forever. The mother, however, did not heed her cry but continued on her way, having eyes for nothing but the wide flung portals.

Then, for the first time, Edith noticed how fearfully dark the world about her was, and what an empty void her life had in reality become. She longed to press onward to the light which beckoned her; she longed to follow in the footsteps of her mother. But the darkness held her captive, she could not advance a single step, her every effort only plunged her deeper into the gloom. She cried in anguish: "Mother, O mother, I perish, I am lost!"

Then, at last, her mother paused and faced about, when, to her consternation, Edith saw that it was not her mother, but another whom her mother had resembled, when she told of the great joy that had come to her. Yet when Edith looked again, the radiant figure was not unknown to her. She had seen that beauteous face before, had felt those keen eyes penetrating her inmost soul. Oh, that she now could find some hidden corner in the wide world, where she could hide from those piercing eyes that looked her through and through!

Still, there was a something in this radiant figure that drew her strongly, almost irresistibly. Was it the look of surpassing tenderness in his face, or the compassionate love now shining from those eyes that before had been so piercing? As if in answer to her question, she heard from afar the sound of angelic voices singing:

"Never shepherd's heart so yearneth  
For the sheep that go astray,  
As God's loving bosom burneth  
For his erring child alway.

How he thirsts, and longs, and yearns  
For the soul that from him turns!  
Couldst thou see his love so tender  
Joyful praise thou wouldest him render.

Crested sea so high ne'er towers,  
Nor abyss is anywhere,  
Nor have fall'n so plenteous showers  
That they faintest semblance bear  
To God's overflowing grace,  
Freely tendered all our days  
To protect us from sin's power,  
And to save in death's dark hour."

She, too, had sung that psalm as a schoolgirl years ago, and had then listened eagerly to the wonderful story of Jesus, who came to dwell on earth. She had heard of his goodness and abounding love, and with the vivid imagination of a child she had seen him going about doing good to all alike. All this had appealed to her strongly. But when her teacher had spoken of Christ's suffering, his crucifixion and death, her impressionable nature had shuddered at the tale, and had she dared, she would have stopped her ears against the awful details of cruel torture. Even now she could recall vividly how poorly those lessons were learned which dealt with this dark chapter in the life of Jesus. For pain and suffering, in whatever form, were repellent to her, who so intensely loved the brightness and the joy of life. As these teeming thoughts went coursing through her mind, the radiance streaming from the heavenly portals seemed to flicker and go out. The effulgent figure she had seen lost its splendor and in its stead she saw the Man of Sorrow, pale, tortured, and forsaken.

She wished to turn her eyes away from the sight; she wished to escape from the haunting look in his eyes, but

she could not. As he now looked upon her, no one had ever looked before. The compassion, the infinite patience, the ineffable love in those wondrous eyes caused her to writhe in anguish. For who was she to accept such love as this! But there was no escaping it. Like her mother's love it never waned nor ceased, it made no demands on her, it gave of itself fully, freely, without asking return.

All her life passed in review before her mind's eye, and it was wonderful to perceive how this love divine had lit up and brightened the path she had trod. How true the words of the psalm she had heard! Could ever shepherd have sought a lost sheep with greater constancy and tenderness than that with which this divine love was seeking to draw her to itself?

So she lay between sleep and waking hour after hour, her feelings growing more tender and subdued, as the watches of the night dragged on their weary length. So soon as daylight came, she would begin to set to rights many things in her life, she would turn over a new leaf and begin a new life in earnest. Not that she intended to turn pietist by any means! Pietism did not appeal to her any more now than before. But she fully meant to become a good and upright woman, a source of joy to her mother, and not unacceptable, she trusted, even to God.

These good resolutions acted as a soothing balm to her agitated feelings. Not for a moment did she doubt her ability to keep them to the letter, for she was a person who knew her own mind, and would know how to carry her high resolves through to fulfillment. True, the Man of Sorrow no longer beckoned her, but the allurements of a new, bright path, a happy future.

And Lieutenant von Stedt?

The question flashed through her mind, but she dismissed it at once. She would not and could not consider it, for if she did, she knew that it would seriously disturb and weaken her high resolve to lead a new and better life.—

When morning came, she was up with the lark, ready to begin her new life with this new day. It was with real pleasure that she plunged into the work awaiting her, and she prided herself on a certain knack and adroitness in managing and carrying through whatever she undertook. Yes, that must be admitted by every fair-minded person. If her unknown father had left her nothing else, she had at least inherited from him certain natural talents, which she meant to put to the very best use for her own advancement. Perhaps, through her own exertions and her inborn qualities of mind and heart, she might even reach the summit of her aspirations and wed a baron of the realm! Stranger things had happened. All these people of quality, who now looked down on her with such lofty airs, would, perhaps, some fine day wake up to find her the peer and equal of them all! Think if she should even be ushered into Birgerhouse and greeted as the guest of Count Heine! The grandeur of this possibility made her so faint that she sank down upon a chair to recover her strength and composure.

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When Edith, later in the morning, was out shaking her rugs with an energy born of her new resolutions, she heard the clatter of a galloping horse, and when her eyes eagerly scanned the highway, she saw that the rider

was none other than Lieutenant von Stedt. Never had she seen a figure so radiant with youth, so stately in bearing as the dashing rider rapidly approaching through the bright morning sunshine. Her cheeks flamed scarlet, her eyes sparkled, and cast to the winds were all her fine resolutions of the night before.

The lieutenant brought his horse to a full stop midst a shower of sparks and gravel, whereupon he greeted Edith by giving her the military salute with his riding crop just as politely and elegantly as if she had been a lady of quality and distinction.

"Already up and at work!" he exclaimed jovially, sending her a winning smile, while with the skilled hand of a horseman he curbed his spirited steed, which had suddenly taken it into its head to bolt.

"Softly, Bruno; softly, my boy!" he urged, patting his horse on the neck, as it tried to rear, "you know very well that it is useless for you to fret and fuss."

Bruno quieted down momentarily, giving his master a chance to relax his grip on the rein.

"How do you like your new home?" he inquired, noticing with self-complacency her glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes. His one great weakness was his love of admiration, and he was fully aware that he cut quite a figure when mounted on a spirited horse.

"Quite well, I'm sure," she replied, smiling up at him.

"I'm glad to hear it!" the baron exclaimed, as he tried to guide his horse up to the gate, but without success. It was quite evident that Bruno had a will of his own. He had already tired of inaction and was eager to be away at full speed along the highway stretching its inviting length before him.

A struggle ensued between horse and master, which finally ended in the complete subjugation of Bruno, but not before the latter was dripping with sweat and the master was pale from the unwonted exertion.

"There now, my dear Bruno! You'll not try that again very soon!" cried the lieutenant triumphantly, as he again patted his favorite on the neck. "But now you will have to stretch out, I promise you!"

With a quick glance at Edith, the young lieutenant observed that she also was expecting a promise from him—a promise of an early visit. And, he reflected, had he not chosen the way to the keeper's lodge for the very purpose of giving her this promise? But somehow, after his struggle with Bruno, he was not so eager for this visit as he had been. Then again, there stood Edith confidently expecting the promise he had come to give her. What was he now to do? Why, visit her, of course, as he had a perfect right to do! He was not a brute, like Bruno, to mind the bit that others tried to impose on him; he was a free moral agent. But as these thoughts went coursing through his mind, it occurred to him that his perfect freedom of action could be better maintained by not yielding to his desire of visiting her. With a burst of candor he admitted to himself that this glorious girl with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes was exercising an undue power and influence over him.

"I will give myself the pleasure of calling on you one of these days," he said, preparing to give loose reins to Bruno. Then, noticing the beseeching look in Edith's eyes, he added: "Perhaps you may look for me this evening."

He could not help observing how Edith's face lit up

with sudden pleasure, and for a moment it flattered his vanity; but almost immediately he repented of his promise and venting his anger on Bruno, he cut him cruelly with the crop, sending him crashing along the highway at the top of his speed.

But Edith stood watching his departure with a smiling face and a joyful heart.





## IX.

Colonel Heine was measuring the length of the drawing room with quick, nervous strides, while Ringmor sat observant of his every motion, and listening indulgently to his occasional outburst.

"You may be sure, Ringmor," he exclaimed, "that we are about to witness great political and social convulsions. I fear that, as a people, we have been satisfied to live on the heritage handed down to us from our forefathers without any serious striving for achievement and progress of our own, but content to rest on the laurels won centuries ago. New forces must be generated, new blood infused, or some fine day the body politic will collapse utterly never to rise again."

"You know, father, that you have spoken of all this before, but, tell me, where are these new forces to come from? I must say that I have neither seen nor heard of anyone so strong, so capable and determined that he could fight any other battles than his own."

"But such men will arise, Ringmor, never doubt it!" the old soldier exclaimed, straightening up to his full

height. "I can see them now, those chosen and devoted men, who will make the name of Sweden honored and great before the world, and who will once more rejuvenate our ancient race. They will spring up from the ranks of the common people, strong, sturdy, determined men, with broad shoulders, iron wills, and hearts undaunted. But they will not be left to fight their battles alone. From all ranks and classes of society those will join them who love their country more than themselves, and to whom fatherland is still a sacred word."

As he spoke his voice trembled with emotion. He reminded Ringmor of one of the prophets of old, and she did not doubt for a moment that his words would come true.

"But what will become of all those whose hearts do not kindle with the spark of patriotism? There must be many such in all classes, high and low alike."

"That I will tell you, Ringmor," he replied earnestly. "All such, to whatever rank or station they belong, will go under and perish in the coming struggle for the new order of things, which they are powerless to prevent, though they strive with all their might to do so. Yonder at the deanery sits a man who double-locks his doors, that he may not be disquieted or disturbed by the pulsing life around him; and all over the land there are many such purblind, narrow-minded men, idle theorists, who have severed their connection with life, with growth and progress. If our people, impelled by this new spirit of independence, are beginning to feel that they can get on very well without the clergy, who can blame them? Long before the people ever thought of deserting the Church, the clergy had deserted them."

"But what makes you speak like this, papa? What

has happened?" Ringmor asked, well knowing that something out of the ordinary must have occurred to call forth her father's words. But the count only shrugged his shoulders without replying. He was unwilling to tell her of the dean's visit and their rather heated discussion, lest Ringmor become prejudiced against him who, after all, was her pastor and spiritual adviser.

So giving a slight turn to the conversation, he continued: "My dear Ringmor, it may be true of us also that we, contrary to better judgment, close the door between ourselves and the people. We should really do all in our power to lessen the distance between the rich and the poor. That would, indeed, be a praiseworthy and a patriotic deed. It just occurs to me, my dear, that I promised to obtain laundry work for a young girl who has lately moved into the old keeper's lodge on Captain Hall's estate. Could you make up a little parcel and carry it over to her to-day? It's a fine day for a walk."

Ringmor signified her ready assent to the plan. It is true that she was expecting a visit from Uno, but she made no mention of this. After all her father had said she would not be the first to think only of herself and her own interests.

It did not take long to get ready, so she was soon on the way. She had a long journey to make through the forest she loved so well. Many were the times that she had traversed it from end to end. As children, Uno and she had made it their playground, and when they grew older, they had often wandered side by side along its well-known paths winding in and out among the firs and pines, old acquaintances and friends of theirs since childhood.

To enter the forest was for Ringmor to enter a veritable dreamland. How often had Uno and she staged within its stately setting many of the most heroic events in the history of their country! Uno had always been the hero, and had appeared in the most varied roles. He had appeared as Torgny, the deemster, before King Eric the Triumphant, who on such occasions was represented by a stately juniper tree, while the mighty concourse of people, appearing on the scene, was represented by Ringmor alone, who "voiced their assent to the eloquent address of the deemster with loud acclaim." At other times they had played Engelbrekt, Sten Sture, Gustavus Vasa, and many another historic character. In fact, as Ringmor now hastened along the forest path, she could recall vividly the chief events, not only in Swedish history, but also in her own. Here she had dreamed grand and gorgeous dreams of her and Uno's future. Here fervent prayers had ascended from her heart to heaven for him whom she loved above all else in life.

Formerly her vivid imagination had pictured Uno as mounting to the very pinnacle of fame and power, but of late her highest hopes for him had been that he should fill with honor his position as an officer in the king's service, and as the master of the rather modest estates of Mountain Oaks.

But as she proceeded on her way, reflecting on things past and present, and dreaming bright dreams of the future, she suddenly heard the clear, ringing treble voice she knew so well, singing *the song of the rose*. Nearer and louder sounded the well-known melody, and Ringmor, understanding that the singer was approaching along some bypath, hoped that they would meet

and, perhaps, walk on together. Her hopes were soon to be realized. For out from the labyrinth of trees and underbrush emerged the tall, commanding figure of a young woman, dressed in simple homespun, a white kerchief on her head, and singing with such perfect abandon that she failed to notice Ringmor until she was almost upon her. Then a violent blush flooded her cheeks, and her singing ceased abruptly, while she tried to hide her embarrassment by making a deep curtsy to the genteel lady she had met.

Miss Heine gave her a pleasant, reassuring smile, as she exclaimed: "What a beautiful song you were singing! I hope you will sing it to the end. It wasn't finished, was it?"

"No, ma'am," replied the other, lowering her eyes and evidently embarrassed at the request, "but I'm afraid I can't sing it when you are listening."

"You need have no fear of me, I assure you, and I do so long to hear the remaining verses of the song."

The young songstress cast a searching look on Ringmor to see if this grand lady really meant what she said. Reassured by Ringmor's friendly smile and beseeching look, she determined to finish her song. As the two young women proceeded along the forest path, Ringmor listened with rising emotion to this clear, bell-like voice, which she had once before admired, when she had heard it pealing through the evening stillness of the park at Birgerhouse.

After the last verse had been sung, the singer was silent a moment; then in a thrilling *pianissimo* she sang it again:

"Though life's carking cares round me cluster,  
Though sorrows their hosts round me muster,  
Yea, e'en though my heartstrings Death sever,  
My Rose, I will lose Thee, no, never!"

"I sang that verse for you, Lady Heine. I felt that you had need of it."

"What do you mean?" asked Ringmor wonderingly. All at once the girl by her side seemed to merge into and become a part of the shadowy mysticism of the forest. This fair girl with her rosy cheeks and strong, lithe figure was the apotheosis of all her youthful hopes and dreams. Could she but interpret this vision aright, her whole future would stand revealed to her. Here within the confines of this forest, associated with the hallowed memories of childhood, she would then learn how many of her bright, roseate dreams would come true.

"I felt that you had need of it; more I cannot tell you," replied the young girl in answer to Ringmor's question.

Ringmor did not press her further, for she understood that no more explicit answer would be forthcoming.

"How beautiful that song is!" she repeated. "You are very fond of it, are you not?"

"Yes, very fond of it!" the girl replied so fervently that Ringmor wondered at it. "To me it is the song of songs—my heart's own song!"

"Tell me why you are so fond of it," urged Ringmor.

"I doubt if I can. I have never tried to tell it before, and even now I feel that I can only give a partial and halting explanation of why that song is so dear to my heart."

After musing a moment she continued: "What I am about to say concerns not me alone but all those who

with me dwell in the cottages and cabins of the poor, and who know so little of the great wide world around us. Who shall say how long, how very long, we have cherished in secret the hope of the dawning of a brighter and a happier day! Our hearts have cried aloud for it. For it we have stretched forth our hands to high Heaven in prayer and supplication. With ardent, searching gaze we have peered into the dim future for the coming of that day. And now, now it has come; now there is feasting and rejoicing; now our hearts are attuned to songs of praise; now words fail us to express our joy! But you, my lady, and the others of your class, you have had your heart's desire, you have not hungered for happiness as we; therefore the song of jubilee has not reached you, nor have you been able to understand the joy that fills our hearts. But this I want you to know, my lady, that this swelling flood of happiness and peace, of strength and hope is free to all."

Ringmor looked upon her companion with a feeling akin to awe. It was so strange to hear this simple girl speak of the dawning of a brighter day. These were the sentiments, almost the very words she had heard from her father only an hour or two before. But he had been looking forward to a new and improved social order; she, on the other hand, seemed to hope for, nay, even to rejoice in a great spiritual awakening.

"You must tell me more," pleaded Ringmor. "What you have said does not seem to have anything to do with the song you were singing."

At first there was no response. Then, somewhat unsteadily, she replied: "It is not an easy matter, let me assure you, to speak of myself. It is easier to say in a general way that God has done great things with me,

than to explain how it was done. For it might easily happen, in telling you my story, that I should magnify myself and belittle the power of God, and that would be a great sin, for to God alone belongs all the praise and honor and glory."

But Ringmor declared that she would very much like to hear the story of her life and its connection with *the song of the rose*, and urged upon her to proceed. Finally her companion yielded, thinking that, perhaps, even this highborn lady might be benefited by hearing the simple account of the greatest and happiest experience in her life.

"I will try to comply with your wishes," she said artlessly, "but while I am telling my story, please remember only this, that God's love is great and abounding, and that we, poor mortals, cause him much trouble through our persistent self-will."

"You must know," she began, "that I have grown to womanhood in a narrow little cabin, where my earliest recollections center about the religious instruction I received. Even before I was old enough to understand the meaning of the word, my parents spoke to me of God. How I wondered then what the good God looked like; and when I began to spell my way in the great family Bible, my wonder increased the more. 'God does not tolerate wrongdoing,' father would say, when he had occasion to punish any of my brothers, 'he demands obedience, therefore I will teach you to obey.' And mother was always so kind and good, sharing freely with those who were poorer than we. Often she would say: 'God is so good, my little girl, he showers his blessings upon us, therefore we must also learn to take pleasure in giving to others.'

"But when I grew older, and began to understand life a little better, I saw how fearfully dark the world was, how full of falsehood and iniquity. I saw how the rich oppressed the poor, and how the poor hated the rich; I saw that the world was full of wicked people, but I never observed that any of them were punished, but were permitted to continue in their wickedness. But when I also saw that the good and virtuous in this world commonly suffered from poverty and want, from sickness and distress, then I began to doubt the existence of a God, or if there were a God, he could not be almighty, and even if he were almighty, he surely was not good, when he permitted so much wickedness to go unpunished.

"The more I brooded over this, the more my heart was filled with darkness and despair. The more of evil I saw in the world, the more powerless I became to resist it. It penetrated into my inmost being as fine dust through the cracks and crannies of a house, and stirred to life all the latent evil of my nature. Evil thoughts, wicked words, unholy desires, all the black brood of sin quickened within me.

"How I suffered, how I struggled, how I wept during those dark days! I read my Bible without ceasing, and without ceasing I prayed and cried aloud to God. But even as I read, new doubts arose; and all my prayers seemed but words, nothing but words. I could not feel that God was near to me as I prayed.

"Then I heard *the song of the rose* for the first time. An evangelist sang it with a voice so powerful as almost to raise the roof of the humble cottage where the meeting was held. There had been much talk in the parish of this man, and it was said that no one could resist

the potent influence of his singing. He, too, had fought his fight with God and had been brought to the verge of insanity in the struggle. But when the battle was over, and he began his life anew, he could preach and sing so that the most hardened sinner melted into tears, and the bruised and bleeding hearts were healed. When he began to sing on the occasion of which I am speaking, I was fully determined not to be influenced by it, but all in vain! Though I had double-locked the door to my heart, the bolts flew back, moved by an unseen power so strong that there was no resisting it. All my doubts were dissipated in the twinkling of an eye, and the rose, the red and throbbing rose, burst in splendor on my sight. All the shifting panorama of life, described in the song, was revealed to me with startling vividness. I beheld the world transformed to a desert waste, and man thrust out from Eden to dwell in the bleak solitudes his sin had caused, hearing ever more faintly God's voice within, admonishing him to repentance.

"All this was nothing new to me, but new and wonderful was the sight of the rose budding in splendor amidst the thorns. O my lady, I can tell you no more! You must behold for yourself the beauty of that rose, before you can begin to realize what treasures are to be found in *the song of the rose*. Here I have a copy of the song; perhaps you will be so kind as to accept it from me, that you may learn for yourself to interpret the imagery of its contents."

By this time they had reached the keeper's lodge, and Ringmor turned to her companion and said heartily: "I wish to thank you for what you have told me and for your beautiful singing. I mean to learn the song

at once. But now I must say goodby as I have an errand in here."

With a friendly nod she turned to go, when she was checked by the detaining hand of her companion.

"Will you grant a request and thereby make me very happy?" asked the peasant girl with a beseeching expression in her pretty pink-and-white face.

"Why certainly, with pleasure," replied Miss Heine, happy in the thought that there was something she could do for this new acquaintance, for whom she already entertained friendly feelings.

"Then please don't enter the lodge to-night. Postpone your visit until some other time."

"But why?" asked Ringmor in astonishment. "I am only going to leave some laundry work with the occupant of the lodge, who is doing such work for others."

The other girl stepped up to Ringmor and said solemnly: "I have a presentiment that something will happen to you in there, and I wish to prevent it, if I can."

She spoke in a low, tense tone, scanning Ringmor's face for the first sign of yielding; but when this failed to appear, she continued: "You must not laugh at me or think me superstitious, for you will find my presentiment verified. In our family, we often know in advance when important events, especially misfortunes, are about to occur. Therefore I beg of you, don't go in there now!"

In spite of herself, a foreboding of evil filled Ringmor's soul, and when, at that moment, she noticed that the road leading up to the gate had recently been trampled up by the hoofs of a horse, she turned pale as death, as the thought of Uno flashed through her mind.

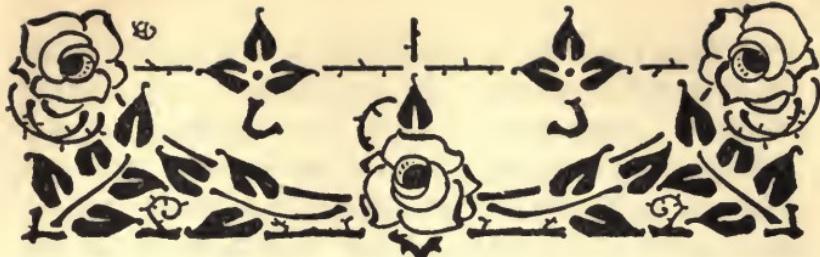
"There is no escaping sorrow," she replied with a wan smile. "Best to encounter it with what strength and courage we have!"

So, nodding soberly to her companion, she advanced to the gate. The young peasant girl remained standing in the middle of the highway with a look in here eye as if she sought to peer into the dim future, but could not quite make out what she saw there.

"One more word, my lady!" she cried, hurrying up to the gate where Ringmor had stopped.

"You spoke truly when you said that there is no escaping sorrow, and a great sorrow is now blocking your way. But remember, there is always a way through sorrow. Remember also that in life's dark vales the rose glows with brightest splendor."





## X.

Edith was standing behind the curtain at her window, peering out at the two young women in the highway. She could, of course, not hear what was said, but she inferred from their actions that it must be something of importance. She was well acquainted with them both; Miss Heine she had often seen at Mountain Oaks, and Karin of New Farms had been a schoolmate of hers in early days. If the truth be told, Edith was smiling derisively at the preternatural solemnity of their mien and actions. It seemed to her that they were foolishly allowing the precious time of youth to be occupied by things more befitting the period of sober middle age or even of years more advanced.

"They are as alike as two peas in a pod," she said to herself mockingly. "I wonder if they have ever been really young? Oh, you proud lady of Birgerhouse! in spite of your wealth and station, I am richer and happier than you, for I am young and know how to make the most of my youth."

But when Miss Heine entered the lodge, an intangible

something about her caused Edith to feel her inferiority. The dignified bearing and aristocratic simplicity of Ringmor commanded instant if unwilling respect. Without acknowledging it even to herself, Edith felt that the gulf between herself and this young lady of quality would be hard to bridge. She knew by instinct that the many generations of culture and refinement which had left their mark on Ringmor weighed much heavier in the balance than the modicum of worldly wisdom and polite manners upon which Edith plumed herself, and which she thought raised her so far above the common people of her acquaintance. Confronted now suddenly by Ringmor, Edith felt how common and insignificant she was. Her dress, how simple and old-fashioned it was; the furnishings in her room, how cheap and commonplace! Why should this fine young lady come prying into the narrowness and drudgery of her life? Haughty and erect, Edith stood in the middle of the room, and the curtsy she dropped, when her visitor entered, was hardly noticeable.

And Miss Heine herself was far from displaying the mental equipoise to be expected from one of her rank and breeding. Her mind was sorely troubled; her late companion's warning words kept ringing in her ears, and as if to verify them she could plainly see that she was not a welcome visitor. And this haughty girl facing her with such a challenging look, was she not the same person Ringmor had often seen at Mountain Oaks?

"I was told that you were in need of work, so I have brought some fine linen for you to wash and iron for me," said Ringmor, extending the little parcel she had brought.

But Edith pretended not to see it. Her eyes were

all for Miss Heine, and as she gazed, all the rage and passion of her soul blazed up within her. All that her proud heart had suffered because of Baron von Stedt now seemed to have its sole cause and origin in Miss Ringmor. This fine young lady it was who stood between Edith and all her fondest hopes. Were it not for Miss Heine, the lieutenant would follow the promptings of his heart, and Edith would soon become his wife. This pale-faced girl must be got rid of somehow; why should she be the obstacle between two loving hearts that belonged only to each other? The strength of desperation seized upon Edith; she would turn the wheel of fate itself to obtain the one great desire of her soul. What if Miss Heine was finer, more aristocratic and cultured than herself; was not she, Edith, stronger, younger in body and soul, and filled with the passion of life and love?

No wonder, then, that Edith replied in a cold, harsh tone: "Oh, no, I am not in need of work, at least not from you, Miss Heine; I can get along very well without it."

A tinge of red crept into Ringmor's face. She was not accustomed to be addressed in this manner, and Edith's unfriendliness wounded her sensitive nature deeply. Pride bade her depart without further ado, but the memory of her father's words determined her not to give up at the first attempt.

"But why do you speak so to me?" she therefore asked gently. "It would please me very much, if I could be of any help to you."

"Distribute your alms wherever you will, Miss Heine, but don't thrust them on me, for I have no need of them," exclaimed Edith hotly.

There was a momentary flash of anger in Ringmor's eye, but she replied with studied calm: "I have not offered you alms, I have offered you employment. There is, I believe, a marked distinction between the two."

To her secret chagrin, Edith realized that Miss Heine was equal to the occasion. She was polite and refined even when angry, and her superiority manifested itself in her great power of self-control.

But this very fact only served to enrage Edith the more. The hot blood seethed and boiled within her veins, and only with difficulty could she control herself enough to exclaim: "Don't you understand what I say? I don't want any work from you, and I won't take it!"

Miss Ringmor gazed on Edith with feelings of wonder mingled with fear. What was the reason, and what had she done that this girl with burning cheeks and blazing eyes should be so angry with her? There must be some secret cause for it. Perhaps Edith's anger was in some way connected with the great sorrow that was to come to Ringmor in this very place?

"You really must tell me why you are so harsh with me," insisted Miss Heine. "Whatever the reason, you seem to have a special dislike for me."

"Yes, I have," Edith replied. Then her dark, lowering face was lit up by a flash of intensest passion, and she cried: "I hate you; yes, with all my heart I hate you!"

Ringmor winced as if under a blow, and she tried to back toward the door. She wished herself far, far away from this terrible place, but she seemed powerless to move. Here she must stand and receive the flood of angry words by means of which Edith hoped to crush

and destroy the one who stood between her and her greatest happiness.

"You turn pale, my pretty miss," cried Edith, "but I have only just begun to speak. There is much, much more that I will say and you shall listen to. The agonizing thoughts of bitter days and long dark nights, the pangs of aspirations thwarted and hopes deferred, you shall know them all! You who are so fine and elegant, I wonder how you would feel, if there were something in your blood, as there is in mine, that strains and struggles to throw off the shackles of grinding care and the petty drudgery of life? You see, I have a father, in rank and station the equal of your own, but because of man-made laws you were born to happiness and wealth, and I to sorrow, poverty, and shame. I never learned to know my father, but I suppose he finally married a woman of his own class after having blasted my poor mother's life. All my life I have lived in the mean and narrow circumstances of the class to which my mother belongs, but all my life I have aspired to the position of my unknown father; and never doubt it, I will reach it in spite of fate itself! A lady of quality has robbed me of a father, and I will be revenged by robbing a lady of quality of her promised husband!"

Step by step Edith had been approaching Ringmor as she poured out her furious invective. Step by step Miss Heine had receded from her, and all the while the pallor of her face grew more pronounced. Instinctively she felt that now, at last, the blow would fall; now, at last, the pitchy darkness, so long hovering above the horizon of her life, would swoop down upon her and envelop her soul.

"Oh, you need not look so shocked at what I say! I

know you are not used to hear the truth proclaimed so baldly, but even now I am not done with you," continued Edith, gloating over the manifest effect of her words upon the highborn lady confronting her. "Do you wish to know the name of the man whom I will claim as my very own? Ah, I see that you suspect it already! Yes, he is none other than your brave lover, the Baron von Stedt. To tell the truth, I robbed you of him long ago! His heart's love has long belonged to me, though you have claimed him as your affianced husband." — —

By this time Ringmor had reached the door and stood leaning heavily against it. She was ready to sink to the floor, and her soul was filled with woe unutterable; but generations of proud breeding kept her defiantly erect, and to all outward appearance perfectly calm and collected.

Then, suddenly, the sound of a galloping horse was heard, which as suddenly ceased before the gate, where the rider was apparently dismounting. Soon rapidly approaching steps were heard along the gravel path, and in a moment the door flew open revealing the figure of Baron von Stedt framed in the doorway.

The young man stopped in his tracks as if turned to stone. Slowly his eyes shifted from the pale, set face of Ringmor to the flaming cheeks of Edith. A gleam of triumph blazed and scintillated from Edith's eyes; a blank look of utter despair was in the eyes of Ringmor. Without being told he knew that words had been spoken, the imprint of which would probably never be wholly erased.

"You here, Ringmor!" he faltered. It was all he could say.

As in a trance, she heard the familiar voice of him

she loved, but it seemed to come to her from across a vast, illimitable space.

"You here, Uno!" she repeated, scarcely knowing that she had uttered the words.

Her tone and manner revealed to him the depth of her despair. He had no need to seek for confirmation in the woebegone expression of her face.

"You are sick, Ringmor!" he exclaimed. "Come, I will take you home!"

"No, Uno, I will go alone," she said with such decision that he did not venture to remonstrate with her. He could see how fearfully she suffered, and he sought for words to comfort her, to heal her smarting wounds, but no words came to his lips. She was so great, so noble in her voiceless grief; he, so small and so contemptible. He felt the need to kneel at her feet and sue for pardon, but he realized that no prayer of his could reach her now.

Without another word Miss Heine turned unsteadily and, as one blind, groped her way out of the room. Now the great sorrow had come. Now it enveloped her in its pitchy darkness. Not for a moment did she doubt the truth of Edith's triumphant declaration that Uno's love was hers and had never belonged to Ringmor. Uno, she knew, took delight in all things young and strong and gay; she was too pale and old and sober for a man like him. There was so much she could think of in defense of Uno, but oh, his faithlessness and his duplicity, how could she ever forget or pardon them!

Soon she was again wandering along the forest path on her way home, but never had her way seemed so dark and so forbidding as now. On every side she encountered her old friends, the stately pines and firs, and all

seemed to cry out upon the faithlessness of Uno and name him with that foulest of all names, traitor. Loyal to her heart's core, she abhorred the very name of traitor. But by what other name was she to call the man who had given his heart's love to a common woman of the masses, and at the same time masqueraded his regard and life-long friendship for her, his equal, under the same guise of heart's true love? Uno was guilty of a double treachery: he had betrayed her to whom he had pledged his love, and he had also betrayed that frenzied girl over yonder in the keeper's lodge.

Uno's treachery loomed so large and terrible before her that it entirely overshadowed her own grief. It mattered little to her now that she had been deserted, that her path would henceforth lead over desert wastes and down into dark, sunless vales; but that Uno should suffer the terrible penalties of a traitor, this it was that caused her woe unspeakable. How strangely awry her world had become! For years and years her life had had but the single aim to see Uno develop into the true knight of her fondest hopes and of her father's. She had always believed that Uno's gifts of mind and heart qualified him beyond all others for the noble career she had mapped out for him. And then, to come to this! With crushing force the knowledge came to her that he had never been what she had thought him; her love had minimized his faults and exaggerated his virtues far beyond their proper due.

And yet she loved him! Indeed, in this dark hour her love of Uno increased with the increasing mental anguish she was suffering for his sake. She felt that she could immolate herself bit by bit for him, that no sacrifice was too great for her to make, if only it would make

of him the noble and loyal man she had thought him. But alas, there was nothing she could do! In her despair it seemed to her that, on the whole, one person can do little or nothing for another. Each human atom seemed hurrying inexorably along its destined path without stop or stay from other human atoms on paths parallel or divergent. The influence of one upon another is more apparent than real. Ringmor was aware of the profligate life Uno's father had led; the shackles of heredity would naturally drag Uno into the same path. Why had her father and she ever thought that they could influence him to swerve from his course and enter upon a better and a brighter path? What madness to hope so confidently, to believe so implicitly all these years that Uno would ever measure up to the standard they had set for him!

The explanation, however, was simple enough: they had loved him so much; they would never cease loving him!

The thought of her father redoubled her anguish. What should she say to him? All at once she realized that her grief and despair were such that words would fail her. The blow had fallen so suddenly, so heavily that even now the full extent of her calamity was just beginning to be borne in upon her soul. The path before her, the friendly forest grew hazy and indistinct, the blackness of night swooped down upon her, she felt herself sinking down, down! How sweet to rest, to sleep, and to forget! — — —

A magnificent temple, grandly towering, with vaulted colonnades and endless arches, high as heaven! — Echoing and reechoing through the lofty pile, she seemed to hear the sound of music, now swelling, now diminishing

with the familiar crescendos and diminuendos of her childhood's forest. How soothing and sweet the sound to her wearied soul! Glorious visions of the past, where men and women had lived, and loved, and suffered; bright dreams of the future, full of hope and promise — all were there! But past and future alike are but parts of a mystic whole. Reverberating from the distant past, reechoing from the dim future, she hears a song whose harmony pervades all time and beats upon the very portals of eternity, lending color and brightness ineffable to both. She dismisses from her mind all thought of self, and as a reward for this act of self-denial she is borne on high to heights undreamed of, and tingling through her soul, she hears the words: "This is life, indeed; all else was but an empty dream!"

Now the music swells nearer and louder, all nature joins in its grand harmony, her heart is thrilled, and with wondering eyes she beholds the coming of a new and glorious day for all mankind. Already she sees the first flush of dawn, now the sun appears, and now the day has come!

But in the glowing portals of the east she sees again the radiant figure of her dream of long ago, and from this figure streams the light now flooding the world. —

A sudden sense of weariness comes over her, strange pains shoot through her head, she lifts her hand to press her throbbing brow, and in so doing she wakes again to consciousness. She finds that she is lying in the open woods. The shades of night are gathering, and already the twinkling stars are beginning to appear. She stirs uneasily and then discovers that her head is pillowled in the lap of some one whom she cannot recognize in the gathering gloom.

"Who is it?" she inquires in a voice that she can hardly recognize as her own.

"It is I, Karin of New Farms, I found you lying here as I was passing."

"But why am I lying here?" she asked in bewilderment.

"The great sorrow has come, my lady," replied the other.

"Yes, sorrow has come," repeated Ringmor, feeling that the words were true, though she could not as yet understand what sorrow was meant.

"But ever following in the steps of sorrow comes the great joy," were the comforting words of Karin.

Not yet fully recovered from her fainting spell, and still recalling vividly her trance-like visions with a lingering sense of exaltation, Ringmor repeated vaguely: "Yes, in the steps of sorrow comes the great joy."

But even as she uttered the words a great fear swept over her soul. Even her old friends, the firs and pines, frowned threateningly down upon her in the thickening gloom. Vainly she strove to unravel the snarled threads of her disordered thoughts, that she might understand clearly what had happened.

"Why do I linger here? I really must hurry home," she said struggling to her feet. Then, as she looked about in utter bewilderment, she noted how changed all things seemed. The path seemed different, the forest seemed strangely altered, and from its depths was heard the wailing cry as of a child. But this would never do! She must collect her scattered wits, she must learn at once the reason for the leaden weight upon her heart.

"But, tell me, what has happened?" she cried, and this time her voice rang clear and firm, as she shot a look

of eager inquiry at the young girl who had appeared so suddenly on the scene.

Karin had but the one answer to make: "The great sorrow has come, my lady."

Then, in a flash, she remembered it all; remembered her walk with Karin through the forest; remembered her failure to listen to Karin, when she pleaded with her not to enter the keeper's lodge; remembered the tragic scene enacted there.

"Sorrow has come," she repeated in a cold, rasping voice, preparing to proceed on her way. Bravely she mustered all her strength; a Heine must show no sign of faltering, whatever the ordeal encountered.

"But the great joy ever follows in the steps of sorrow," Karin reiterated with gentle insistence.

A wondering look came into Ringmor's eyes only to give way to one of dull resignation as she replied: "I suppose we are not born to joy but only to do our duty to the utmost."

"Not so, my lady! The great joy comes to those alone who do their duty to the utmost," replied Karin, her fine features lighting up with a pleasant smile.

Miss Heine took a few uncertain steps along the path, but tottered perilously.

"Let me help you," cried Karin eagerly, hurrying to her side.

Supported by the strong arm of the peasant girl, Ringmor was able to continue on her way to Birger-house.

"Two are better than one," said Karin lightly, by way of breaking the silence that had fallen upon them.

"But the pathway of life is generally so narrow that there is no room for more than one at the time," re-

plied Ringmor. The sympathetic nature of Karin found a ready response in her heart, and she was grateful for the companionship of this girl, whose sunny disposition helped her for the moment, at least, to forget the horror of the path that she must tread alone.

"Believe me, no one needs to walk that path alone, who does not wish to do so," responded Karin earnestly. "No path is so narrow, no road so steep, no situation so desperate that He will not be by our side, who promised to be with us always, even unto the end of the world. O, my lady, I want to tell you that it is my greatest happiness to know that he is near me always!"

In this strain Karin continued to speak, as they walked on together, and Ringmor listened to her words as to a wonderful fairy tale, repeated to soothe and quiet a fretful child. Not that she believed what she heard; her grief and despair were too deep for that, and she knew that the time was near at hand when these would so fasten their clutches upon her that all thought or hope of peace and happiness would be banished from her forever.

\* \* \*

But back in the keeper's lodge the baron had stood a long time staring at the door which Ringmor had closed between herself and him. So long as she had remained in the cottage, he had known neither what to say nor do; but now that she was gone, he slowly recovered his faculties, and turning angrily upon Edith, he cried: "Just what have you been saying to my betrothed?"

Not a whit abashed, Edith laughed him in the face and said with biting irony: "What should I have told her but the truth?"

The baron wineed at the words, which struck home with such power that he was at once put on the defensive. But he maintained his blustering attitude and asked spitefully: "It would be interesting to learn just what you mean by truth."

But Edith was quick to note the first sign of wavering in him, and she determined to throw discretion to the winds and put all to the test of the present moment.

"Just what is truth?" she murmured, looking up to him with glowing eyes. All the love and passion of her stormy nature were concentrated in that look, which revealed without a pretense of reserve her full sentiments for the young man confronting her.

But the baron either could not or would not read the message in her eyes.

"What, then, is the truth?" he repeated, and there was that stirring within him now which craved a truthful answer to the question.

Edith's burning gaze never left his face. She wished him to read the secret of her heart, that he might realize how much she loved him, and that he loved her more, much more, than he had ever thought.

"The truth is that you belong to me by every right of love," she declared in a voice tense with feeling. "It is not Miss Heine but I who possess your heart's true love."

Baron von Stedt recoiled at her words. He became suddenly conscious of the power she exercised over him. Never had she seemed so beautiful as at this moment, when her love, declared without reserve and given unstintingly, transfigured her countenance with a light kindled from within. He forgot for a moment that she was only a common woman of the people; he saw before

him only a woman who loved, and adorable because she loved.

But though he saw her thus with all the charms of womanhood heightened by love, he knew now, as he had never known before, that this was not the woman whom he really loved. No, the one to whom he was bound by the strongest ties of affection had just departed and had closed the door between herself and him. And strange as it may seem, the closing of that door revealed to him how much he loved Ringmor, just as Edith's act of flinging wide the door of her heart to him forever closed his heart to her, for now he knew that his feelings for Edith were not those of love. As a boy he had often gathered his arms full of flowers from woods and meadow only to cast them ruthlessly aside, if he espied his favorite Linnæa hiding deep within the shadow of the firs. Ringmor had on those occasions begged him to let the flowers grow and not deprive them of their short, sweet lives, especially when it was the Linnæa that he loved and sought to possess.

The incident recurred to him now and filled him with remorse, for was not Edith such another flower whose beauty had attracted him for a time, and which he had broken from its stem, before he fully realized the injury he had done?

"No, Edith!" he declared at last, stretching forth his hand as if to ward her off. "You are pretty, you are light-hearted and gay, and I have liked to bandy words with you, but the truth is that I do not love you."

But she would not believe him. Her eyes still sparkled with the light of love, and her face had lost none of its expression of perfect confidence and assurance.

"You are mistaken, Uno," she declared, unconsciously uttering the name which she had whispered so many times to herself. "You may think highly of the stately Miss Heine, but you love me."

If she had hoped to convince him, she failed miserably, for her words only served to strengthen his conviction that this was not the woman whom he loved.

"Edith," he said soberly, "I feel that I have done you a great injustice, I have—"

With a gesture of the hand she interrupted him. The awful truth had dawned on her at last: he did not love her—had never loved her! The light in her eyes flickered and died out, and the blackness of night was in her soul. He had used her as a plaything to be cast aside, when he was tired of her. She had given him the choicest treasures of her heart, and in return she had received nothing—nothing!

She hid her face in her hands, ready to sink to the floor from humiliation and shame.

"Go," she cried wildly, "go! I never want to see or hear you again! Leave me in peace, or I will not be responsible for what I may do."

He went, not because he was afraid, but because he believed that he would be doing Edith a kindness by leaving her now. — — —

As if turned to stone, she remained standing where he had left her, staring blankly at the door through which he had disappeared. For a moment she fully expected to see him burst into the room and laughingly declare that it was all a huge joke; but he did not come, instead she heard the sudden clatter of his horse growing rapidly fainter in the distance.

"His horse will fall and kill him!" she exclaimed in

an undertone, a wild look of triumph in her eye, but the next second she was all regrets, for she realized how empty and desolate her life would be, if he were dead.

"O God, protect him!" she cried aloud, lifting her hands to heaven. "Thou must take care of him, for in his recklessness he does not know how to care for himself."

The prayer had sprung without volition from her soul, and not till after it was uttered did she know what she had done. Then a great rage against herself filled her heart. How could she implore God to protect this man, who had blighted her young life, and whom she hated with all the intensity of her rebellious heart?

Hated? How could she hate him, when her heart was still beating loudly with the love of him, though he had forsaken and rejected her? But hate him she would, hate him she must! So without reflecting on the inconsistency of her action, she again raised her hands to heaven and cried: "O God, give me strength to hate him, hate him, for alas, I cannot hate him as I would! — — Help me, God, I am in sore distress! — Help him, O help him, God, for he, too, has sore need of Thee!"—

She sank down upon her knees beside the wooden bench and prayed and cried that God would wreak His vengeance on her faithless lover; then, beseechingly she pleaded with God to aid her in her need, and him—to aid him also. No living soul could have unraveled the glaring contradictions in her prayer, and she, least of all. The inevitable battle between good and evil was being waged within her—a fearful struggle between the powers of light and darkness. There she

lay for hours that dark night, her proud, rebellious heart beaten and battered by the conflict raging in her soul, until it lay bruised and bleeding at the feet of Him who said: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden!"

She who had begun by praying for strength to hate, concluded her agonizing prayer with a petition the sentiment of which had sprung unbidden from the distant memories of childhood. Over and over she kept repeating it: "Father, forgive him, forgive him, for he knows not what he does!"

To be able to pray so, when crushed to the ground, when bleeding from wounds which seem incurable, that is victory indeed, that is to fight and win as did the Saviour. No one who has not experienced it can realize the sweet sense of peace that comes with such a victory. It is a foretaste of that heavenly bliss which those must feel of whom it is said: "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb."

A peaceful calm crept into Edith's soul. True, the conflict between light and darkness was not yet ended, but in her soul the shades of night were lifting before the first faint flush of dawn, heralding the coming of a new day.





## XI.

There were many in the parish who had always complained of their hard lot. With the advent of pietism these grew louder in their complaints, averring that now their lives were becoming wretched indeed, and almost unbearable.

"I've lived in poverty and wretchedness all my days," declared Oak, the parish shoemaker, "but never have things been quite so bad as they are now, since both my old woman and the boy have been running to these revival meetings."

He sat working on a pair of boots in a little back room at Birch Hill, owned by one of the richest peasant farmers in the parish, and Mother Albertina herself, the imperious mistress of the place, sat listening to his words while she superintended his work with watchful eye. He knew very well that the master of Birch Hill was not in sympathy with the pietistic movement. The tall and burly Karl Erik Karlson knew what he was about, for he was both churchwarden and grand juror in the parish, and neither he nor his wife would ever

think of attending any of these meetings. But Mother Albertina, who, by the way, secretly aspired to the title of Madam Carlson, was greatly interested in the happenings and gossip of the parish, a thing she could neither help nor deny.

"What is it I hear about that boy of yours?" she inquired. "There is talk of a miraele happening to him."

The shoemaker laid aside his awl and hammer, and with much sawing of the air with his arms he replied excitedly: "Miraele! Everybody is talking of miraeles these days. What miraele is it, that a boy is sick in bed one day and up the next? A greater miraele, to my thinking, is the fact that I, poor man, am able to support him and the rest of the brood at home!"

Madam Carlson, however, was not to be put off so easily.

"But your boy had been sick for a long time, I understand," she remarked.

"Yes, indeed!" he replied. "For years and years I have toiled and almost worn my fingers to the bone for him and the others. For years and years he has lain there like a log, and I have been left to feed and clothe them all. You have no idea, Mother Albertina, what a dog's life I have led of it!"

"I am not Mother Albertina to you, my good man," replied the proud mistress of Bireh Hill with a frown, determined that this shabby old shoemaker should be made to know his place.

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure!" exclaimed the shoemaker, as he rose to his feet and made an awkward bow. "If I forgot myself for a moment, you must not lay it up against a distracted old man, whose head is full of cares and worries."

"But how is it with your boy now?" asked Madam Carlson, readily mollified by the shoemaker's show of respect. "I suppose he is beginning to be of great help to you in your trade?"

Mr. Oak, who had seated himself after making proper amends for his slip of the tongue, again bounced up and said with preternatural solemnity: "My good Madam Carlson, if he were the most skilled shoemaker in the world, I would not have him working alondside of me, for he troubles me, that boy, he troubles me so that I cannot remain at home when he is in the house."

Having thus unburdened his heart, he again resumed his seat, but his features still bore the unmistakable stamp of deep melancholy and self-pity.

"But why can't you remain at home?" persisted Madam Carlson, whose curiosity prompted her to go to the bottom of this matter. "You are master in your own house, I should suppose. In what way, then, does the boy trouble you?"

Shrugging his shoulders, the shoemaker replied with a great assumption of dignity: "Of course I am master in my own house, but what good does it do me? I can't hinder him from speaking of that miracle of his, and when he isn't doing that, he is continually dinning his religious songs into my ears, and if I put my foot down and silence him, he goes about looking so sanctimonious that a body would think he was preparing to fly up to glory at once. You can see for yourself, Mother Al—Madam Carlson, I mean, begging your pardon—that the life I lead is far from a happy one."

He looked up to her with a pathetic, helpless expression, as if seeking her aid in the sad predicament in which he found himself.

"There must be some way out of your difficulty," she said encouragingly. "Why don't you see to it that he gets steady employment elsewhere?"

He shook his head sadly, as one who knew very well the futility of such advice.

"Haven't I tried and tried," he exclaimed, "but on the large estates no one will have him, and at the smaller holdings they can pay him little or nothing?"

Secretly, Mother Albertina could not refrain from pitying the poor old shoemaker. No doubt it would have been much better for him, if his son had remained a helpless invalid, and better for others also. All the acts of her own life were arranged and determined upon beforehand; each day and week and year had its special duties assigned to it; she knew exactly what she had to do, and the machinery of her household moved with the precision and accuracy of a well-oiled clock. She could understand what a fearful mess there would be, if anything should occur to disturb the even tenor of the life at Birch Hill, such as the miracle with George, which had so upset the serenity of the shoemaker's life.

At the dinner table that day she broached the matter to her husband. It must be explained at this point that Karl Erik Karlson of Birch Hill viewed the entire parish with the same lordly air of authority as that assumed by his wife in the management of her household. When she took upon herself to champion the cause of the shoemaker, she acted in the interest of domestic peace and happiness, but when her husband undertook to look into this matter, he was actuated by the larger interests of the entire community. He realized that the peace and quiet of the parish had been seriously upset by this much talked of miracle, and as

a result the people were becoming restless and no longer satisfied to live under old conditions. To-day they were running about attending revival meetings, which only added fuel to the smoldering fire of their discontent. To-morrow—who could tell what insane things they might be up to then?

"Of course I know that the old shoemaker is a hopeless good-for-nothing," admitted Mother Albertina, concluding her narrative, "but for all that I can't help pitying him. He is never at home of nights any more, but sits swilling at the tavern until he is sure that no one is up to make it unpleasant for him when he returns to his miserable home."

Her husband made no immediate reply. Instead, he helped himself to a huge portion of fried pork and potatoes, which he proceeded to dispatch with a speed that would have astonished anyone but his faithful helpmeet. She thought it only natural that such an important personage as her husband should have an abundance of good fare to fortify himself against the manifold cares and duties of his daily life.

While Karl Erik Karlson sat enjoying his meal with unflagging zest, he was revolving ponderously in his mind what his wife had told him. Something must be done, he resolved at last, to stem the tide of changing conditions. He was beginning to fear that he might be deposed from the proud position he had held so many years as the virtual ruler of the parish. To prevent this he would strive to the utmost to maintain the old established order of things, which had proved so eminently satisfactory to all concerned. Reasoning thus, he did not neglect the viands set before him, and the more he ate, the calmer he grew. He could recall

former attempts to deprive him of his power and influence. At one time things had looked very bad for him, indeed, because of the opposition of Count Heine. But he was not the one to yield without a struggle; he had pocketed his pride and betaken himself to Birgerhouse, where he had laid his words so well that he had won the full confidence of the count, whose active support he had ever since enjoyed.

At last he could eat no more, so with a sigh of contentment he thrust his hands into his pockets and tilted his chair backward, as was his wont when preparing to expound his views to his attentive and admiring spouse.

"Really, mother," he exclaimed, "the times in which we live are growing stranger and queerer every day. Those who occupy positions of honor and trust among us haven't any more sense than a fool or an idiot. What would become of the parish, I should like to know, if we peasant farmers didn't keep our eyes open?"

When Karl Erik Karlson said "we peasant farmers," he always meant himself in contradistinction to the gentry of the neighborhood; but when he spoke of "the peasants," he alluded to all those tillers of the soil who had not attained a position of prominence and wealth equal to his own. "Peasants," in his estimation, were those who labor and toil in the sweat of their brow unthinkingly, and without aspiring to anything higher than a mere pittance.

"If you didn't keep your eyes open, things would come to a pretty pass," declared Mother Albertina with a whole-souled conviction, greatly flattering to her lordly mate.

"Whose duty is it, by rights, to look out for the general welfare?" he continued. "I, certainly, have not

been appointed guardian of the parish. I have my big farm to tend to, which is quite enough for me. But when he who has the general welfare intrusted to his care can't even manage his own house, much less the whole parish, a person is compelled to set his shoulder to the wheel, for fear the whole load may topple into the ditch."

"Right you are, father! How would the dean ever be able to get along without you? You do more now for the parish than he does."

"Of course I do!" he exclaimed, "and they all know it—that is, all except the dean, who is slow to acknowledge my services. Can you wonder that this angers me? I have always stood by him, always upheld and defended the religion of the Church, but in spite of this, he treats me just as curtly as if I were an ordinary peasant. Think of it!"

Mother Albertina knew what it was that rankled in the bosom of her husband. It was the annual custom of the dean to give an elaborate dinner to the gentry of the parish during the Christmas holidays; then, later in the spring, he would invite the parishioners of lesser note. Now it so happens that our worthy churchwarden had for years hoped for the honor of an invitation to appear among the gentry at the Christmas dinner, but up to this time no such invitation had been forthcoming, hence his bitterness toward the dean.

Anxious to turn his thoughts into other and pleasanter channels, his wife inquired: "But what are you going to do in the case of the shoemaker's son? It won't be so easy to manage, I'm afraid."

Instantly Karl Erik Karlson forgot his disappointments. Here was an opportunity not to be neglected

of displaying his wonderful abilities as a manager of difficult situations, and it acted as a balm to his wounded feelings.

"Oh, I could dispose of the shoemaker's son in a jiffy by taking him into my service, where it would soon become apparent how much of a miraele he has to boast of. But a man of my position must look to the happenings in the parish from a larger point of view. It's clear as day to me that there will be no rest or peace for any of us, so long as these meetings are allowed to continue. These demented pietists are turning the whole parish upside down."

Mother Albertina gazed upon her husband with a look of undisguised admiration. Wasn't it wonderful how keen an intellect her Karl Erik possessed? Surely, there was none like him throughout the length and breadth of the land!

"Right you are again, Karl Erik!" she cried, "but how are you to hinder them from running to these meetings? I hear that there are crowds and crowds of people following these wandering evangelists from place to place."

The venerable churchwarden let his chair down with a bang, as with glowing eyes he stared fixedly before him. Then his great, gnarly fist crashed down upon the table with a force that sent the dishes dancing, as he said: "These meetings must be stopped, I say; and sure as I am a man of my word, they will be stopped before I am many days older!"

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That same afternoon Karl Erik Carlson, grand juror and high warden of the established Church, set forth on his mission to the deanery. He had ordered his

favorite Brunte hitched to the surrey he used only on state occasions. He had also been particular to put on a clean collar and necktie, but as the collar was several sizes too small and unconscionably high, he was in grave danger of strangulation. But a great man like himself would naturally pay no attention to trifles of this sort, and would submit to a greater inconvenience than a tight collar to promote the best interests of the parish.

When the churchwarden came swinging in through the great gate of the deanery, Mrs. Linder, the dean's wife, hastened in to her husband to announce the new arrival. The dean, who had ceased to trouble himself about the pietists, was again deeply immersed in his studies and was, if possible, more difficult to reach than ever before. It had occurred to him that such movements as this pietism had appeared from time to time in the history of mankind and had quickly vanished without leaving any permanent trace behind.

Clearly, then, it would be a waste of time for him to devote himself to a study of this and other trivial happenings of the present day, when the vast storehouse of antiquity was opening its treasures to him. Besides, we know so little and understand less of what is actually taking place around us.

When, therefore, his wife burst in upon him, crying excitedly: "Father, father, bestir yourself, Mr. Karlson of Birch Hill is coming!" he paid not the least attention to her words.

But she was not to be put off, for she knew very well that it would be better for them to be on good terms with the churchwarden than to have him as an enemy.

"Father, you must put on another coat," she insisted. "You can't receive in that shabby old jacket."

Looking up from the book over which he sat poring, he said fretfully: "I will not put on another coat. If people persist in troubling me outside of office hours, they must take things as they find them."

"Don't be so unreasonable, father!" she exclaimed, almost on the point of tears. Why was he such a confirmed bookworm? But now was no time for repining, so she hurried out to receive their visitor.

Karl Erik Karlson appeared stiff and formal in his bearing, and he was painfully conscious of his tight-fitting collar. Ordinarily he had a ready flow of words, both at home and abroad among his acquaintances, but when he appeared at the deanery or otherwise came in contact with the gentlefolk of the neighborhood, he was awkward and as dumb as the proverbial clam.

Not so Mrs. Linder, however! She received her visitor with a flow of words that was almost torrential.

"Welcome, Mr. Karlson, welcome!" she exclaimed cordially, pressing his hand and smiling up into his face. "But step in, step in! I hope you are well; but I see you are; I am so glad! But how are all the folks at home? Mother Albertina, I suppose, is busy as ever with her weaving. How I envy her the strength and vigor she possesses!"

Meanwhile Karl Erik Karlson was making valiant efforts to bow his acknowledgments, but he was not finding it an easy thing to do. His Sunday coat threatened to split up the back, and the collar—how it tugged and pinched at his throat! Secretly, he registered a vow that he would lay in a new supply the very next time he went to town.

"Mother sends her best regards," he managed to say at last, when Mrs. Linder paused for breath.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Karlson!" she gushed, "and be sure to convey my thanks to her. How pleased I would have been if you had taken her along with you; we meet so seldom of late, it seems. Don't you think she could tear herself away from her work for a few hours and accompany you next time you honor us with a call?"

"Yes, I think that could be managed," he replied, then asked as if the question had just occurred to him: "The dean is at home, I hope?"

"Oh yes, indeed! father is not hard to keep track of," she replied, as she led the way to the dean's study, the door of which she opened with a friendly: "Walk right in, Mr. Karlson, father is sitting here waiting for you."

She gave the caller a friendly pat on the back as he entered the room, then shot a warning look at her husband, which he failed entirely to observe, as he had not yet lifted his eyes from the book before him.

"Good day, your Reverence," said the churchwarden, stepping forward into the room.

"Good day, my friend," was the learned dean's greeting, as he slowly raised his eyes from the book, which he as slowly proceeded to close before arising to welcome his visitor.

The two shook hands, after which Karl Erik Karlson was invited to sit down on the dean's leather-covered sofa. The dean himself sank down into his favorite rocker, which he kept going back and forth with a slow, sedate motion during the whole time of the churchwarden's visit.

After the latter had cleared his throat several times, he was ready to state his errand, having carefully formulated his words before starting out for the deanery.

"I have something of importance to discuss with your Reverence to-day," he began, "something that must be attended to at once."

"Tell me what it is, my friend," said the dean non-committally and without the least show of interest.

Quick to notice this, the churchwarden replied with some asperity: "I will come to the point at once. Your Reverence knows very well that I and my house have always been loyal to the established Church and have felt at home within its fold. But of late so many new-fangled religious notions have sprung up, proclaimed by preachers who come singly and in droves, that the people scarcely know what to think or whom to believe. I want to tell your Reverence that we peasant farmers are stirred up about this matter, and are beginning to wonder why your Reverence, whose duty it is, has not taken steps to put a stop to this religious fanaticism."

The very reverend dean rocked back and forth for some time without replying. If the truth be told, he really had no desire to disturb his scholarly mind by considering a matter so unimportant; much less, then, did he wish to figure in any measure looking to the suppression of this sporadic religious movement. But he realized that he must be circumspect in imparting his views to the churchwarden, lest a false interpretation of his position be spread abroad among the people.

So, after due deliberation, he replied: "My dear Mr. Karlson, you must not think that this movement is as dangerous as it seems. I admit that, for the present, things look rather bad in this parish, but if you look out over the country at large, you will readily perceive that this is only a local disturbance, destined to run its

course in a short time and give place again to the peace and quiet we have so long enjoyed."

But Karl Erik Karlson was not to be calmed so easily. So much was at stake, it seemed to him. The welfare of the entire parish was threatened.

"I want to assure your Reverence," he stoutly maintained, "that one whomingles with the people as much as I do cannot help seeing that there is more danger than you realize. If these meetings are not stopped and these preachers sent about their business, it will soon become impossible to maintain law and order in the parish. What kind of work, for example, can you expect of those who are running about night after night attending the meetings of these revivalists?"

This time, also, the dean was in no hurry to reply. He felt the sting of personal allusion in the churchwarden's words regarding the advantages to be derived from constant mingling with the people. How little real appreciation there was, after all, of study and the learned pursuits of scientific investigation! How sad to think that the people could not be made to recognize and respect the vast amount of wisdom stored up in the grand old tomes of antiquity!

"It may be true that you hear and see many things, when you are out among the people," the dean replied, "but I have found that the best way to judge of present-day conditions is to view them in the light of the historic past. If this is done, much that now seems so great and important, will be found to have little or no real value. As such I class the pietism you seem to fear so much, and therefore I have decided not to interfere with the holding of these meetings. Let the people keep on till they tire of it."

The churchwarden now understood that here he could accomplish nothing. The dean lived in a world apart and could not be reached or influenced by anyone outside of this. One more effort he would, however, make before giving up all hopes of the success of his mission.

"Yes, let them keep on with their meetings, and you will soon be preaching to empty church pews. Even now the number of those who uphold the religion of the Church is growing steadily smaller."

With these words he essayed to straighten up, but remembered just in time that he must make no sudden or violent movements out of consideration for his Sunday coat, and besides, his collar warned him of his own imminent peril of strangulation. So he subsided with the comforting reflection that he had spoken his mind to the dean, who now knew what to expect and could choose his own course of action.

Dean Linder rose from his rocker with slow, deliberate dignity, and placing himself directly in front of the astonished churchwarden, he said impressively: "My friend, the church pews may become empty, but the church itself will remain; the number of those who uphold 'the religion of the Church,' as you put it, may grow less, but that matters little, for the people need religion, and religion needs them not at all."

These words were wholly beyond the comprehension of the churchwarden, but this much, at least, he understood, that they were meant to end the interview.

Somewhat crestfallen, he arose, saying: "I have nothing further to add, I believe, so I will be getting along home. Good-by, your Reverence, and thank you for your words."

"Thank you, for coming!" said the dean, visibly re-

lieved. "I think we understand each other, even if our views differ on certain points. Farewell, Mr. Karlson, and remember me to your good wife."

But in his heart Karl Erik Karlson did not agree with the dean that they understood each other, for it was quite clear that the dean had his head full of such strange notions that no sensible man could comprehend them. His constant poring over his books must have so affected his mind, that he was hardly accountable for his words.

When the churchwarden emerged from the study, he was met by the ever present Mrs. Linder, who exclaimed: "What a lot you gentlemen must have had to say to each other to-day! The coffee has been ready ever so long; you must have a cup with us before you leave."

Without knowing just how it came about, he found himself drinking coffee in company with the dean's wife, who quickly managed to worm from him the purpose of his visit.

"My dear Mr. Karlson!" she exclaimed, "father is entirely too indulgent. His goodness of heart, and nothing else, prevents him from taking active measures against these pietists."

It was not a little trying to his pride to depart from the deanery with no greater success than this, especially as he had been loud in his promises to his wife that he would bring the dean to a proper sense of his duty. His wife, he reflected mournfully, had, no doubt, by this time informed the shoemaker of the trip to the deanery, and the purpose of it.

But as he was slowly driving along the road toward home, he met, most opportunely, it seemed to him, the

very man he wished to see, namely, the gardener at Birgerhouse.

"One word with you, my man!" he cried in his most domineering tone. "I'm glad I met you. How long are you going to continue to harbor these itinerant preachers at your house, and allow them to hold their meetings there? I tell you, we peasant farmers are beginning to grow tired of it, and will not put up with it much longer."

"What have you to remark against the meetings?" the gardener asked calmly. "There is certainly nothing wrong in our congregating to hear the Word of God."

"I take my stand by the religion of the Church," declared the churchwarden pompously, "and it would never enter my mind to attend any of your meetings. And I repeat what I said: we peasant farmers will not put up with it much longer. It is causing a disturbance throughout the parish and is contrary to the old established order of things."

"Yes, it is true," replied the gardener, "that there is always more or less of a disturbance when the Spirit of God begins to breathe upon the dry bones. Then the inevitable conflict begins between the old and the new. But this I want to tell you, Mr. Karlson: don't try to dam the stream when the spring freshet is on, for it will rise and rise, until it breaks through every obstacle and carries all before it."

The churchwarden gave his horse a vicious cut with the whip, so that it started forward with a jerk—he did not wish to listen to such twaddle. But the next moment the horse was brought to a sudden stop, and Karl Erik Karlson turned to face the gardener still standing by the roadside, and shouted: "Do you call it decent

or befitting a Christian to offend against the law and order of the parish? Doesn't the Bible say that we should submit to every ordinance of man? Do you think it right and proper, for instance, for George, the shoemaker's son, to carry on at home, so that his poor father must flee to the tavern for peace and quiet? And such folks think that they have a better religion, and more of it, than the rest of us!"

"But how does George carry on?" inquired the gardener, advancing to catch the churchwarden's reply. "If I know the boy right, he is not the one to drive his father out of the house."

To his secret chagrin, Karl Erik Karlson could think of nothing but the miraculous healing of the young man, so he could only reply in a blustering tone: "I thing it is trying enough on a father to see his son one day a helpless invalid, and the next up and around, and dinning his pietistic nonsense into everybody's ears. If such a wonderful change has occurred in him, why doesn't he undertake something useful to help his poor, overburdened father in support of the family? But, of course, it is ever so much easier to go about playing the saint."

"Is it to be wondered at that the boy is transported with joy at the miracle wrought with him?" replied the gardener, his face lighting up at the thought of it. "And is it so remarkable that the whole parish is astir, when God has manifested his goodness and mercy to us so abundantly? Were not all our young people helplessly lost in sin and transgression; were they not lame and palsied before the coming of the Great Healer, through whose grace life and health were freely bestowed on all who were willing to receive it? Do you wonder that

songs of rejoicing arise both in heaven and on earth, when a sinner repents of his way and turns to God for help and succor?"

But this fellow was even more impossible than the dean, so the churchwarden again brought his whip down on the horse, causing it to start off at full speed. Karl Erik Karlson was out of humor, angry in fact, and the vials of his wrath were sure to be poured out upon the first person that came in his way.

Mother Albertina hurried out to meet him as he entered the hall. "How long you stayed, my dear old man!" she exclaimed. "Supper has been waiting for you an hour or more."

"You and your supper!" he retorted angrily. "Food seems to be the one idea you are capable of. What kind of a wife are you, anyway, to lay out a collar that has been nothing but a torture to me since I put it on? I must tend to all things myself, whether great or small, if they are to be done right. Women can't be depended on for the least thing any more, it seems."

Slamming the door to his chamber, he proceeded to tear off the offending collar and, with a little more caution, to divest himself of his coat that fitted him like a glove, whereupon he stalked into the living room in a far from happy mood to eat his belated supper.

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After his encounter with the irate churchwarden, the gardener continued on his way home. Before he reached it, he had come to the resolve that he would invite the shoemaker's son to become his apprentice at Birger-house and learn gardening under his direction. Surely, he reflected, George was the very one to take kindly to such an offer.

No large gathering had assembled that evening in the gardener's cottage; neither was there any preacher present, only the old peasant from New Farms, who read a selection from Luther's Postil.

After he had finished, the gardener opened his Bible and read with solemn voice:

"And he said unto his disciples: Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on.

The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.

Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have store-house nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?

And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?

If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?

Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them.

If then God so clothe the grass, which is to-day in the field, and to-morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith?

And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind.

For all these things do the nations of the world seek after; and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.

But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Closing the sacred book, he let his gaze rest for a moment upon the little gathering. Old and young, men and women, upon the faces of them all he saw plainly stamped the marks of anxiety and suffering, of toil and grinding care. And this was the "little flock" which the churchwarden so loudly accused of disturbing the peace and quiet of the parish! He smiled to himself at the thought. Not a one could he see, who seemed in a fighting humor; not a one, who appeared to have the least desire of causing a disturbance; not a one, who would venture an attack upon the established social order, but rather, more than one, who trembled at the very thought of such an attack upon that which they held dearest—their right to worship God according to the dictates of conscience.

As this thought occurred to him, he repeated again the last verse of the gospel he had read: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Then he added by way of comment: "When we look upon ourselves and mark how prone we are to sin against God, then our hearts are filled with fear; and when we look out upon the world so full of evil, whether appearing in the guise of the most alluring enticements, or under the threatening aspect of overwhelming ruin, then again our hearts quake with fear, and we are sorely troubled. We ask ourselves: 'How shall I make my way through the dangers besetting my path, how win the crown of life, how reach my eternal home?'

Be of good cheer, little flock! For if you earnestly seek the kingdom of God, all these things shall be added unto you, and you need have no fear. Neither need the accusations of your own hearts trouble you, for, as

the children of God, you are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, a fairer raiment than ever worn by Solomon. As the lily, which neither toils nor spins, receives its pure, white dress by slow and unobtrusive growth, so must you also grow in grace and purity. And, O my friends, do not fear the dangers of the great evil world, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom, the battle for which has been fought and the victory won."

It was the simplest exposition of a gospel text that ever was heard, but his hearers seemed pleased and edified. There was something so winning in his way, something so convincing in his words that they were involuntarily reminded of the apostle's words: "I believed, and therefore have I spoken."

Just inside the door of the cottage sat the shoemaker's wife and son. They were having an anxious, difficult time of it at home; try as he would, George could get no employment, and his father could not bear the sight of him about the house.

But the words they had heard had cheered both mother and son. God would see to their troubles and arrange all for the best in his own good time.

But God had already done so, and help was at hand.

"Would you like to learn gardening, George?" the old gardener at Birgerhouse asked after having greeted mother and son.

No immediate answer was forthcoming. Mother and son could only look at each other; tears were in the eyes of both; God's answer to their prayer was so sudden, so unexpected.

"O, there is nothing I would like better!" he ex-

claimed in a low, tense voice, "but I had never dreamed of anything so good, and I am not worthy of it."

His eyes sparkled, and his cheeks glowed as he spoke; the joy was almost greater than he could bear.

The old gardener stood looking at him without replying, at which the mother took alarm and hastened to explain the words and manner of her son.

"You see," she explained, "he has always been so fond of flowers and all growing things. When he was lying helpless on his cot, the smallest green twig was a source of unfailing comfort to him, and now that he is well his interest has only increased. He treasures the simplest flower more than others gloat over their silver and gold."

"You are the very boy that I have been looking for, George!" exclaimed the gardener heartily. "I need some one who can rejoice with me at the beauty and splendor in God's great garden of nature."

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And so it came about that Karl Erik Karlson, the churchwarden, had helped, though unwittingly, to find the right position in life for George, the shoemaker's son. So all things work together for good to them that love God.





## XII.

Baron von Stedt had spent a restless night after his visit to the keeper's lodge. His conscience had troubled him as never before. Vivid pictures of many incidents in his past life were flashed upon the screen of memory, incidents upon which he now greatly dreaded the light of publicity. Again and again, as he tossed on his pillow, the question would arise: "If Ringmor knew of this, what would she say and what would be the consequences?" His old excuse, that he was no worse than others of his rank and quality, now failed to restore his equanimity. But another thought served to lull him to a sense of being more sinned against than sinning. "Why," he asked himself, "are young women so prone to run after men and lose their hearts to them on the slightest provocation, thus openly inviting them to play with fire? Are they not themselves to blame, if such play ends in tears and misery? If all young women were like Ringmor, the world would be different and better in many respects."

But then the disturbing thought obtruded itself:

"When your faith is pledged to a woman so good and pure, how can you excuse your thoughtless dallying with other women?"

There was no escaping the question; it pressed insistently for an answer. One way of vindication alone was open to him: weakly he laid the blame on the evil traits inherited from a profligate father.

"Is not faithlessness in my very blood?" he sighed. "Was it not my father's misfortune never to keep his given word? They should consider these things over at Birgerhouse, before they judge me too harshly, otherwise they will do me a palpable injustice."

However there was little solace for him in this reflection. What if the colonel should exercise his authority and separate him from Ringmor? What if Ringmor herself should break their engagement? Such a thing might well happen, for he knew of old how seriously she took the most trivial matters. He recalled with growing self-abasement her beautiful dreams of his bright future: he was to be her knight without fear and without reproach, the protector of the weak and the valiant champion of all that was good and noble. A sudden realization of what she must have suffered for his sake swept through his soul, and for the first time since his boyhood he felt genuine regret and remorse. He was experiencing, though he knew it not, the first faint throes of the great sorrow which ever goes before the coming of the great joy into the lives of men.

The next morning a messenger from Birgerhouse brought the baron a little sealed packet.

With trembling fingers he tore off the wrapping, knowing full well what it contained, yet dreading to have his worst fears realized. But when he had opened

the small pasteboard box, there lay on its fleecy bed of cotton the little band ring he had given Ringmor on her confirmation day.

With boyish frankness he had told her then that she must wear it until the day when he would put another ring upon her finger in token of their betrothal.

He remembered with a rising sob that she had then looked up at him with eyes so deep, yet so transparent that he could read her very soul as she replied: "Always, Uno! No matter if you do give me another ring, I will wear this always."

Still, here the tiny circlet lay glittering in his palm. As he had proved false to her, so now she had broken faith with him. He took what comfort he could from this thought. True, there was not much for which he could upbraid her, but what little there was he would use to lessen the distance between them. Never for a moment did he give up the hope of winning back the love which he had lost, but he realized now, as never before, how difficult the task would be.

His face was drawn and haggard when he seated himself at the breakfast table, and none of Mrs. Strand's carefully prepared dishes were to his taste that morning. When the old housekeeper entered with the coffee, she almost dropped the tray, so great was the fright that his appearance caused her.

"Oh, I hope you are not sick!" she cried, her respect for the young master yielding to the maternal instincts of her nature.

"Sick? Of course, not!" he replied so testily that she could only look the astonishment she neither dared nor could express.

No sooner had he spoken than he repented of his

harshness; but, as he was in no mood for sympathy, he remained as stern and distant as before. He gulped down his coffee hastily, whereupon Mrs. Strand departed with the tray, sad and ill at ease.

"Our poor baron is sadly out of sorts to-day," she imparted to Mats, who sat eating his breakfast in the kitchen. As he was about to reply, a gong sent its loud summons through the house. Not often of late had it been heard, but when it did sound, it put life and motion into the rather pampered servants of Mountain Oaks. Almost immediately a maid came hurrying into the kitchen with the message: "The baron's orders, he wants his saddle horse at the door at once!" Then she added with playful menace: "You had better move your stiff legs briskly, old Mats; the master is in no mood to wait."

The coachman started up from the table and out through the door as fast as his old legs could carry him. It was well, he reflected, that the horse was already curried and brushed, and would only need to be saddled and bridled before being led forth.

Within a minute or two Bruno stood champing his bit impatiently at the horse block before the main entrance, and at the same time the baron appeared in the door. The tight fitting riding costume set off to advantage his lithe, slender form. But Mats could see that his master was not happy, and this was further confirmed when the baron without a word snatched the reins from his servant's hand and with the curtest of nods swung himself into the saddle.

Old Mats was a well trained servant and knew very well that he was not to speak unless addressed, but when he saw his beloved master looking so depressed

and sad, he could not refrain from exclaiming: "God bless you, good master, this day and all days!"

The young man gave a start; he had hardly noticed the presence of Mats before now. But the words, coming as he knew they did from the old man's heart, touched a hidden chord in his own heart on this day when so much was at stake. It flashed through him that he was in sore need of God's blessing in the venture upon which he was just embarking.

"Thank you, Mats, thank you!" he replied, smiling wanly upon his old servant, then putting spurs to Bruno, he was off and away. The coachman stood looking after his master, until he disappeared beyond a bend in the road, then he folded his hands piously and said: "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace!"

Uphill and downhill he tore along the road between Mountain Oaks and Birgerhouse at a speed which even Bruno, wont to fret at the curb, at last found trying to his strength and mettle. But to-day the master was without mercy. Groves and fertile fields swept past them; farmsteads and lonely cottages appeared and vanished. On and on they sped. A winding, silvery band glimmered in the valley beneath; he knew it to be the broad expanse of the river, and soon he was charging along its bank, nor did he check his speed where the highway makes a sudden turn to cross the great bridge that spans the river, though it was known to be a dangerous point, for in his present mood he was reckless of all danger. Once across the river, he was within the confines of the broad acres of Birgerhouse. On former occasions he had always felt that he was

coming to his own when he reached this point, but to-day he felt that he was an intruder and an alien.

He came at length to the forest, through which the highway led; the proud, primeval forest of Birgerhouse, without a rival in the county nor even in the entire province. Over and over again he had described to his friends in glowing terms the magic charms of this forest, until they had come to regard him, and laughingly to call him, the presiding genius of its mystic depths. Every time Ringmor and he had cantered through it, or side by side strolled along its winding paths, it had revealed to him new and unsuspected beauties. But where before the golden portals to the magnificent castle of his youthful dreams had stood invitingly open, they were now forbiddingly closed. The very pines and firs, the friends and boon companions of his boyhood, scowled darkly down upon him.

In a sudden access of rage Uno dug the spurs deep into Bruno's flanks, sending him in wild career along the highway. The pine forest was left behind, and he entered the extensive park lands of Birgerhouse, encircling the manor for almost two miles on all sides. Here deciduous trees of all kinds flourished in endless variety; here cowslips and lilies of the valley grew in endless profusion, and between the white, slender stems of the birches gleaned the smooth surface of the lake as a great silvery shield.

At the entrance to the drive leading up to the manor house he reined in his foaming steed. He felt that he must pause to collect his thoughts and to brace himself for the ordeal before him. Never before had he seen so clearly that Ringmor was a child, an indissoluble part, of the nature in the midst of which she had been

born and grown to womanhood. The deep solemnity of the forest, its haunting mystery, and the unceasing cadence of sweet harmony heard from its depths, these were the very root and foundation of Ringmor's character, and the smiling park had spread its sheen of airy brightness over all. How blind he had been not to see all this before! Then he would have understood her better and would never have attempted to shape and pattern her character to suit his own, nay, he would even have permitted his own character to be molded by the beauty and grandeur of this same nature. Mother Nature would have made a better man of him than he had now become through years of intercourse with the gay world about him.

Sitting thus in somber self-communing, he reviewed his past, and could see with growing self-contempt what a shuttlecock he had been in the hands of his friends. Back and forth he had been volleyed between the good and evil influences of his associates, until there was scarcely a shred of individuality or character left to him, and with this poor shred he had come to Birgerhouse, thinking, fool that he was, that it would pass muster with the colonel and Ringmor. How could he hope to measure up to their high standards when, even if he gave his all, there was so little to give? How large they loomed to him now, and he—how utterly small and despicable!

Suddenly he noticed how badly he had used his faithful Bruno in their headlong dash. He must hasten to the manor, in order that his poor horse might receive needed care and grooming.

"Poor boy!" he exclaimed, patting Bruno's neck, "you have a pretty hard master, haven't you?"

But Bruno, who had already forgotten his cruel treatment, tossed his head and nickered as if to express his gratitude for the kind words.

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A servant led away the horse, and the housekeeper received the baron at the door with the announcement that Miss Ringmor was engaged, but that the colonel would see him in his office. He noticed at once that there was a certain stir and flurry about the place, which he found it hard to account for.

Count Heine was busily engaged at his desk when Uno, knocking at the door to announce his coming, entered the room. How well he knew its furnishings from days of old; its massive oaken furniture, the family portraits on the walls, the antique bookcases containing many priceless volumes, which no one read nowadays, but which would be sadly missed, if they were not in their accustomed places.

"Welcome, Uno!" said the colonel with a somewhat distant air, as he laid aside his papers and arose to receive his visitor. "You are abroad early this morning," he added, trying to assume a more conventional tone.

"You will admit, I think, Uncle Heine, that I have my good reasons for calling thus early," replied Uno, bravely trying to appear unconcerned, as he accepted the colonel's invitation to be seated.

"Well, yes, I was expecting you," replied Count Heine, nervously playing with his watch chain. "But let me tell you, you have your trouble for your pains and might as well have spared yourself this visit."

He ceased fingering his watch chain, and looking Uno

in the eye he added: "My daughter will under no circumstances take back the ring she sent you."

Though the colonel uttered these words in a commonplace voice, Uno felt that his words were final, and that nothing he could say or do would avail him now.

But with a fine assumption of dignified calm he replied: "Ringmor has once for all accepted this ring from me and promised to wear it always. And while I have nothing to say in my defense, Ringmor would not be Ringmor if she broke her plighted word."

Having said this he placed the ring on the desk before the colonel.

Count Heine was somewhat taken aback. This was a point of view which had been entirely overlooked by both himself and Ringmor. Tenderly he recalled the time and circumstances of Ringmor's promise, and he was at a loss as to how to proceed in this delicate matter.

"I will let my daughter decide," he finally said, taking the ring and leaving the room.

The colonel remained away so long that Uno, who was restlessly pacing the floor, could bear the suspense no longer. He was on the point of going in search of Ringmor, when Count Heine finally reentered the room.

"My daughter bids me say that she will keep the ring and with it her plighted word, but she releases you absolutely from every tie that binds you and her. Now, in order to avoid gossip, I propose that you continue to visit us, and be assured that you will always be a welcome guest at Birgerhouse. But remember also that your engagement to Ringmor is at an end."

The colonel had expected that Uno would make a scene, or at least be crushed by this intelligence, but

nothing was further from the fact. He listened to the colonel's message with the greatest unconcern, for he did not believe a word of it. It could never be true that two souls, so devotedly bound up in each other from earliest childhood, could be thus ruthlessly sundered at a single blow.

"Do you really mean that I am to believe what you say?" he asked incredulously.

"Every word of it!" declared the colonel positively. "It is the express wish of Ringmor that all shall be at an end between you, and even if it were not so, I, her father, would forbid, and do now forbid, any thought of union between my daughter and a man who does not even know the meaning of the word constancy, much less the keeping of it."

Slowly the truth in all its bald reality began to dawn on Uno. Had he not confessed to himself but an hour ago that he was infinitely small and despicable in comparison with the greatness and nobility of Ringmor's character? What, then, was more natural than that she should shun a union with him? But in spite of all, he would not, he could not believe it.

"I must hear this from her own lips," he said firmly. "You must permit me to speak with her."

Much as the colonel desired to refuse the request, he was unable to do so, although he felt assured that an interview between the two would only serve to tear up wounds which as yet were far from healed. But a stirring of paternal love for this pale youth before him caused his stern heart to soften and relent.

"You shall have your wish, but never think that you will gain anything by seeing her," he said, whereupon he left the room to go in search of Ringmor.

Before long the door flew open, and Ringmor appeared leaning on her father's arm. The very room seemed brighter with her presence and a heavy load fell from Uno's heart. All would now be well; Ringmor would know how to adjust matters so as to remove all difficulties and misunderstandings.

But when she stood before him, there was an expression in her face that he had never seen before. She had suddenly become strangely like those stern old counts and countesses whose portraits hung about the room, and who seemed to look down upon them with searching, critical eyes. As children, Ringmor and he had often laughed at these stately scions of an ancient family, and mimicked their proud mien and dignified bearing. It never occurred to him then that Ringmor would one day remind him strongly of these ancestral portraits. But as he looked upon her now, his courage fell, and his hopes were sadly shattered.

It afforded him but a melancholy satisfaction to see the ring again upon her finger, for he thought that she wore it only from a sense of duty, and he did not wish to add to her already heavy burden by holding her to her promise to him.

"You need wear the ring no more," he said tensely, "I release you from your promise to me and ask you to put Uno von Stedt out of your heart and forget him."

But even as he spoke, he knew that she would never forget him, nor the happy years they had spent together. *She* belonged to those who were, indeed, forgetful of self, but who cherished in loving remembrance those whom they had loved and lost. *He* was of those who forgot, who had no room in their hearts for anything but themselves and their own selfish interests.

"If I may, I will keep your ring," she said softly, and without lifting her eyes to him.

As one with palsied tongue he stood before her, vainly trying to plead with her to take him back into her heart and her affections. But all in vain! The sphere in which she moved was too exalted for the likes of him, and a parting was inevitable. But one last word he needs must say—his manhood cried aloud for it.

In this supreme moment of his life he understood, as never before, what she had meant to him. Now that it was too late, he knew that she was the sunshine of his life, his life's chief treasure, his very all. He could not think of life apart from her; in her all the hopes and ambitions of his life were centered.

With infinite tenderness, coupled with a renunciation that was tragic in its finality, he seized her hand in both of his and said simply: "Thank you, Ringmor, thank you for all you have been to me!"

One quick glance of unutterable woe she sent him, and then she whispered: "It is for me to thank you, Uno, now and always!"

But when she had said it, she withdrew her hand. Uno saw how pale she was, and in a flash he understood the secret of her resemblance to the family portraits: the great sorrow had entered her life. What had he done? In his mad folly he had made desolate not only his own life, but hers also.

Again he seized her hand and stammered: "Forgive me, Ringmor, O my love, forgive me!"

She did not reply to him at once. It seemed to her that she had nothing to forgive, that she was culpable as well as he.

"My poor Uno!" was all she said, and as he bent over

to kiss her hand, she laid her other hand a fleeting moment on his bowed head. Then before he could realize how it had come to pass, she had vanished, and he was alone in the room.

\* \* \*

Uno did not linger long at Birgerhouse. Within a few minutes Ringmor saw him mount and ride away down the stately drive leading up to the manor house. At that moment she understood fully what that parting meant to her. No words can tell the fearful anguish of her heart. To her disordered fancy it seemed that she and Uno had belonged to each other long before either of them had seen the light of day, and that the threads of their lives were inextricably interwoven. And yet that one dark hour had sundered them, and henceforth each must tread life's dismal path alone! — —

But what if this were impossible? What if she could not live without him? The question rose unbidden in her soul. Ought she not to have considered this before she spoke the fateful words?

Poor heart, how weak, how strong it is! How strong in the hour of renunciation, when all that is best within it responds to duty's call! How weak to bear the burden of its woe, when time is given to reflect!

A knock at the door, her father's well-known knock, recalled her to herself. With head held high and form bravely erect she stood there to receive him. Her father's daughter would show that she could suffer and be strong. Instinctively she knew that he was also suffering and would need to lean upon her strength.

"My poor little girl!" he said with voice hoarse and trembling. "You have had a hard time of it to-day."

So much of tenderness and sympathy were in his words that all at once her heart overflowed and she lay sobbing out her sorrow in her father's arms with all the abandon of a grief-stricken child.

"Weep on, my child," he urged so gently that there was nothing in his tone to remind one of the stern old soldier. "Weep on, it will relieve and comfort you. The sorrow that finds expression in such tears as these can never cause you lasting harm."

She felt so secure, so sweetly safe within these loving arms that the very thought of taking up her lonely life again at Birgerhouse filled her with alarm and dread.

"Father," she sobbed, "I can't endure to remain here now, where everything reminds me of Uno and of all that was brightest and happiest in the past. Why can't we go away for a time?"

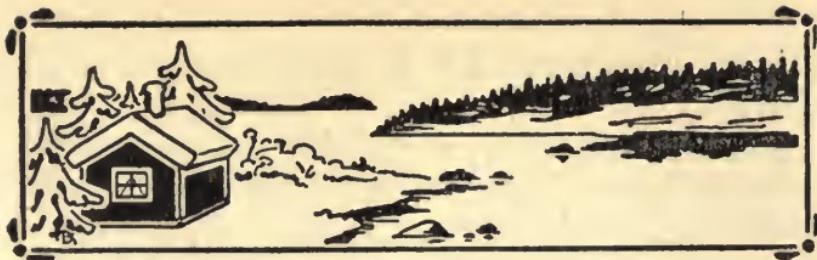
"We can, my child, of course we can," he replied heartily. "It will do you good to get a change of scene. But where shall we go?"

Long and silently she pondered, then with a sudden kindling of the eye she exclaimed: "I know of no one whom I would rather visit just now than the sweet little wife of Major Bruce. O father, let us visit them at Tower Hall!"

"An excellent idea, my dear!" exclaimed the colonel. "Come to think of it, I am aching for the sight of my old friend Herman, and I am sure that his estimable wife will be just the company that you need."

\* \* \*

And so it came about that on the following day the comfortable family coach rumbled out through the great ornamental gates of the Birgerhouse estate and proceeded on its way to the Bruces of Tower Hall.



### XIII.

Major Bruce was a rotund little man, who moved about upon his short legs with the sprightliness of youth, despite his avoirdupois, which he found difficult to keep within proper bounds. He was already far past sixty, but counted himself among the youth of the land, and grew impatient when his gray hairs were mentioned, or when it was suggested that the time had come for him to retire on a pension. He took a lively interest in all that transpired, not only in his own parish, but also in the country at large, and he was always ready to express himself forcefully on any and every topic under discussion.

His wife, on the other hand, was slender and petite. Her trim and dainty figure formed a striking contrast to her husband's rotund form, and Count Heine had never ceased to wonder how the major had ever won a wife so soulful and ethereal.

"There is no woman in the world like my Hedvig," the major had often declared, when he and Colonel Heine met at the annual field maneuvers of the regi-

ment. "Somehow, I feel lost when she is not by my side."

As a matter of fact, the count had really noticed that his jovial comrade in arms was not himself when parted from his beloved Hedvig.

In acquiescing so readily to his daughter's proposal that they pay a visit to the Bruces of Tower Hall, Colonel Heine hoped that the influence of the major's wife would act as a tonic on the overwrought feelings of Ringmor. Besides, new faces and new surroundings would serve to divert her mind and prevent her from brooding over the great sorrow which now clouded her life.

The colonel and his daughter were welcomed to Tower Hall with such manifest warmth that they were quite overpowered. The major was profuse in his expressions of joy at seeing his old comrade, while at the same time his gallantry to Ringmor knew no bounds. His wife was less profuse in words, but the cordiality of her welcome manifested itself in the many little attentions she paid to the comfort and well-being of her guests.

The two men were soon engaged in animated conversation. A large batch of military matters had to be discussed and news items exchanged concerning recent appointments and the like. Fellow officers had been promoted, or pensioned, or married; there had been cases of serious illness and even of death—all these items were gone over with lively interest and infinite detail by the two old friends, who of late had met but seldom. The estates of Birgerhouse and Tower Hall were separated fully a two days' journey by coach, and despite the major's vaunted youthfulness and the colonel's wiry frame, the two old warriors were beginning

to feel their years and no more undertook long journeys without urgent need.

When they had continued for several hours threshing over all matters of interest and importance that occurred to them, their conversation finally began to lag and would, no doubt, soon have come to an end, had it not been for a happy thought of the major's, whose whole bearing clearly showed that he had hit upon a choice bit of news to impart.

"My dear Heine!" he exclaimed, "do you remember that schoolmate of ours at college, who was at once the delight and envy of us all because of his meteoric progress in his studies? You surely have not forgotten Thorsten Lans, the fellow who would go on a tear almost every night, but whose brilliant intellect, despite his revelry, fairly gleamed and sparkled in the classroom!"

For some time the colonel ransacked the hidden nooks and crannies of his memory until, at last, he found what he was searching for, when he exclaimed: "I've placed him now,—a tall, ungainly fellow with a homely face, and muscles and sinews of iron. He was, as you say, a genius in the classroom, but what I have reason to remember most was his prowess in the rough-and-tumble encounters on the campus."

"You've hit it!" cried the major fairly beaming with joy. "I wonder if you could guess what became of the lad?"

With a shrug of the shoulder the colonel replied: "Such prodigies as he never amount to much in after life. I suppose he won his degree with sufficient eclat to astonish even the most hardened of his old professors,

after which the chances are that he ran off to sea or took up with some other equally adventurous life."

By this time the major was near to bursting with the news he had to tell. It amused him immensely to hear his old friend, the colonel, map out with such assurance a harum-scarum career for their former schoolmate.

"What a fortune teller you could have made of yourself, dear Heine!" the major cried shaking with merriment. "All indications pointed to such a life as you have mapped out for him. I can see him now as a roving sailor, or why not say a dashing buccaneer on the Spanish Main, where might is right, and law and order mere empty terms. There he goes leading a boarding party in an attack upon some poor, unfortunate merchant vessel! Ho, ho! Ha, ha!—Would you believe it—our old friend Thorsten is at this very moment the pastor of this parish, and I myself am responsible for his appointment to the position!"

Great was the pleasure and triumph of the little major to note his friend's astonishment, which he proposed to increase to actual amazement by the revelations he still had to make.

"I must say that you surprise me, Herman," said the count with animation. "Come; tell me the rest of it, for I see that there is more to tell."

"You may be sure there is," continued the major eagerly, "but first you must know that Thorsten is not one of those dry-as-dust preachers whom no one cares to hear. He is a regular great gun at a sermon, and people flock from miles around to hear him, often filling the church for hours ahead of the appointed time. It has actually happened that Hedvig and I have

had to bring chairs along and sit in the sacristy to hear the sermon. What do you say to that?"

"Well, well! I'm surprised, I must say, very much surprised!" exclaimed Colonel Heine. "And what increases my astonishment is not so much that Thorsten has turned out to be such a remarkable man, as that you should go to the trouble of bringing chairs to church to hear a sermon. The Herman Bruce that I used to know would never have thought of such a thing."

Somewhat taken aback by the colonel's bantering words, Major Bruce was for a moment at a loss as to what to reply, but his innate candor soon came to his relief.

"You are right, old comrade!" he exclaimed, "there was a time when churchgoing was not exactly in my line. And I will admit that the first time I went to hear Parson Lans, my motive was curiosity, pure and simple, but that I continued to go is to be ascribed largely to the influence of the little woman sitting over there beside your daughter."

No sooner had he alluded to his wife, than he felt impelled to rush over to her side, where he remained for several minutes feasting his eyes upon her with undisguised admiration. Then he came back to resume his conversation with the colonel.

"The case of Thorsten Lans puzzles me to this day," he resumed, pacing forth and back before his friend. "How he came to choose theology at the university is more than I can tell, but I presume that he passed his examinations with the same ease and brilliancy as at college.

After his ordination he received an appointment as curate in a rural parish, where he led a dog's life of it.

and so he began to drink again and live a careless life generally, being transferred from place to place until, at last, no one would have him. Not that he couldn't preach, for he could do that to move the very stones to tears, but between times he was the veriest sot. He was warned by the consistory, given leave of absence time and again, but nothing seemed to help. Finally he became an utter wreck, morally and physically.

Then a sudden change comes over him. He turns over a new leaf, becomes a sober and self-respecting person, and begins to preach as no one in these parts had ever preached before.

None of his colleagues, however, believed in the genuineness of his reform. Try as he would, the poor man could get no regular appointment. I have thought that perhaps the ecclesiastical authorities feared the effect of his sermons, for those who prefer to lead a life of sloth and somnolence do not take kindly to a man who is wide awake and would make others so.

It was by the merest chance that I happened to hear of all this, and as I have the appointive power in the parish, what more natural than that I should give the holding to my old friend, Thorsten Lans. I need not say that I was actuated by sympathy and charity alone, and I counted on the man's showing some sense of gratitude for my kindness to him. But what do you think the fellow said the first time I met him in the sacristy after the services? Why, these were his very words: 'Herman, if you don't repent of your sins, you will go straight to perdition!' The man meant well, says Hedvig, but you can imagine what a turn it gave me."

"But you think the world of the Reverend Lans, you

know you do, Herman," exclaimed Mrs. Bruce, who had silently followed the conversation of the gentlemen.

"Indeed, I do," replied the major heartily. "Thorsten is a preacher through and through, and you may be sure that he does not sweeten the porridge to suit everybody's taste, but dishes it out to all alike. He hammers home the truth until you ache all over, but somehow, the more he pounds, the more you like him. We need more preachers of his kind and fewer of the windbag variety, who are continually spouting forth a lot of glittering generalities."

"You have aroused my curiosity to the highest pitch!" exclaimed the count. "I shall be delighted to meet an old schoolmate again, and to hear him preach."

\* \* \*

It soon became apparent to Count Heine that his old friend, the major, had been deeply affected by the preaching of his pastor. Whatever twists or turns their conversation took, Major Bruce was sure to come back again and again to the wonderful conversion of Thorsten Lans, and his no less wonderful power over the hearts of men.

"You see it's like this, friend Heine", he remarked one day, when they were promenading through the grounds of Tower Hall, "we may busy ourselves more or less all our lives in trying to patch up our morals without accomplishing anything worth speaking of. As for myself, I may as well admit that, from the day that Hedvig became my wife, I have tried to lead a better life, and to all outward appearance with some degree of success."

"But the case of Thorsten Lans is different, far differ-

ent," he continued with a sudden tightening of the throat that made articulation difficult. "His reform has started at the root of things and worked outward. Isn't it little short of the miraculous that a man so degraded as he should suddenly master his besetting temptation, and throw off the shackles that had fettered him for years?"

This the count readily admitted, then giving a sudden turn to the conversation, he began to speak of the religious activities among the people in his own parish, concluding with the question: "Aren't you troubled with pietists here?"

Somewhat hesitatingly the major replied: "I hardly know what you mean by the term pietist. Meetings are held almost every Sunday evening in the schoolhouse, if that is what you refer to, and I have heard that our pastor holds cottage prayer meetings here and there in the outlying parts of the parish, thus bringing spiritual consolation to many who for various reasons are unable to attend church. I hear also that he has been warned once or twice by the powers that be for overzealousness, but these warnings do not seem to have caused him any uneasiness.

After supper all the servants were called into the dining room to participate in the evening devotions. This was a new departure at Tower Hall, and the count correctly inferred that it had been brought about through the influence of Mrs. Bruce. She it was, also, who read the Scripture lesson and the evening prayer.

But when she afterwards seated herself at the piano and began to play a hymn, it was the major's powerful voice that led the singing.

When they separated for the night, Mrs. Bruce fol-

lowed Ringmor up the stairs, much to the latter's uneasiness, as she feared to be questioned about Uno; for earlier in the day the gallant major had started to utter bantering pleasantries about herself and Uno, but he had stopped at once, when her heightened color and evident embarrassment made it clear to him that the subject was painful to her. In the present instance, however, her fears were groundless, which was a source of great relief to her. So far from causing her any pain, there was something in the words and bearing of her hostess that acted as a healing balsam to her bleeding heart. Even if Mrs. Bruce had known the full extent of Ringmor's suffering, she could not have adopted a wiser course than she did to cheer and comfort her young friend.

When they entered the small suite of two rooms which Ringmor was to occupy, her hostess said: "Now I will sit here in the outer room while you undress, then I will come and tuck you in bed, as if you were my own little girl."

Silently Ringmor obeyed, and while she was undressing she wondered at the unusual kindness of Mrs. Bruce. Not that she had not always been good to her, but so tender and lovingly considerate she had never been on the occasions of Ringmor's former visits.

"Why are you so good to me?" Ringmor asked, when Mrs. Bruce entered her bedchamber.

"Because I feel that you are in need of mothering," her hostess replied, beaming upon her with maternal tenderness. "I love to think of you, and to treat you, as if you were my own child."

A shade of sadness swept over Ringmor's face as she replied: "My own mother died when I was too young to remember her. But I have never missed her as I do

now. If she were with me now, she would know how to explain the reason for the darkness and the difficulties of the life that we must live. For is it not so that the mother has already fought and won the battles which confront the child?"

Mrs. Bruce clasped Ringmor's hands in her own warm grasp as she replied: "My dear child, I can understand and appreciate your intense yearning for a mother's wise and loving counsel, but there is one to whom you can turn for help and guidance, who is abundantly able to fill the place of the mother whom you love, though you have never known her. Need I tell you that it is your Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ? A mother may be able to dissipate some of the darkness that threatens to engulf her child, but Jesus alone can lead us out into the full light of day, he knows our every weakness, he has suffered all our woes and sorrows and triumphed over all the foes and dangers that beset our pathway through life."

Ringmor felt ill at ease and hardly knew what to reply. Instinctively she felt that the words she had heard were true and beautiful but, somehow, they failed utterly of their purpose to cheer and comfort her. There was so much of misery and sorrow in her life that needs must be explained, and in this life where should she turn if not to those of her kind who had suffered even as she?

"I see you do not fully grasp the import of my words," said Mrs. Bruce gently, when Ringmor failed to make reply.

Ringmor flushed with sudden confusion at these words, but after a moment's hesitation she said haltingly: "I fear that I am not so religious as you are, and

though I try to grasp the meaning of your words, I fail somehow to do so."

For answer Mrs. Bruce smiled tenderly down upon her, kissed her lovingly on the forehead, and bidding her goodnight, she withdrew from the room.

The ensuing days were replete with new and strange experiences for both the count and his daughter. To both it seemed that hitherto unexplored regions of the world in which they lived were suddenly revealed to them. The major, whose lively temperament had on more than one occasion rather tired the colonel, now surprised the latter by giving evidence of enterprising activity with regard to all the various details of farm management.

"We have no right to idle away our precious time," the major would say, "and the care of my estate is beginning to interest me as never before. It is bringing me in touch with Mother Nature in a way that I had never dreamed of. If you would really enjoy life, you must follow my example, brother Heine."

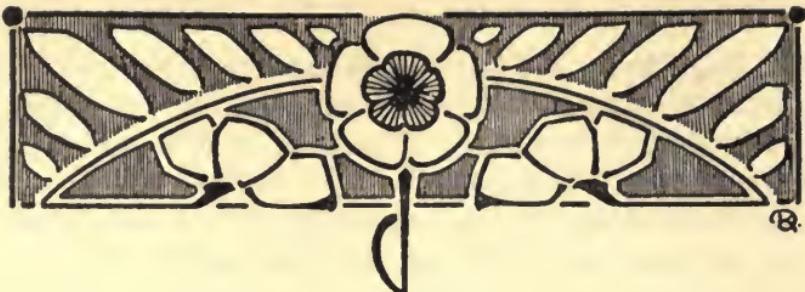
Colonel Heine laughed heartily at his friend's words. As a matter of fact, he had for years endeavored without avail to interest his friend, the major, in the intricacies of farm management. What wonder, then, that the colonel was immensely amused to have the tables turned upon himself, and to hear the major urge upon him the very thing that he had tried to impress upon his flighty friend?

"Herman, old boy," he replied, "I have always taken a lively interest in the management of my estate, while you have hitherto sadly neglected yours. Come, tell me, what has caused this sudden change of heart in you? Is it Thorsten Lans or your estimable wife to whom the credit is due?"

Major Bruce was in a quandary. He might have answered with equal propriety that his change of heart was due to the influence of his pastor, or to the gentle insistence of his wife, but neither would have been the whole truth.

So, after a moment's pause, he replied, looking the colonel straight in the eye: "The credit is due to neither the one nor the other. To God alone belongs the honor and the glory for whatever change for the better that you find in my poor self."





## XIV.

It was Sunday morning.

Ringmor was standing by the window watching the people streaming to church. She had never seen such a sight before. An endless procession of vehicles and pedestrians moved along the great highway past Tower Hall. Heavy farm wagons crowded with men, women, and children lumbered by. Some, who had far to go, had brought along sacks of hay for their horses. Many, so she afterwards learned, had started at daybreak in order to reach their destination on time. Old and young, rich and poor, people of high and low degree, all were moving steadily onward in the same direction as if drawn by some powerful magnet.

Within the great house a peaceful quiet reigned. No noise or bustle disturbed the Sabbath stillness of the place. Even the garrulous little major was hushed and subdued, and his gentle wife moved softly about with only a word of direction here and there to the servants, who in their turn seemed to have imbibed the restful spirit of the day.

Major Bruee had arranged to have a pew reserved for himself and guests at the morning service, but it was with difficulty that they reached it, as even the aisles were crowded with people.

Count Heine at once recognized his old friend and schoolmate, when Thorsten Lans appeared before the altar after the singing of the opening hymn. There was the same tall, lank figure, the same homely, angular features as of old, but a new light gleamed from his deep-set eyes, so burning, so intense that his very soul seemed to be consuming with the zeal that flamed within. The colonel noted that his manner of conducting the ritualistic part of the service marked him as a man with magnetic power over the hearts of his fellow-men.

Surely, this man knew what it meant to lose one's life for Christ's sake! He had sounded the depths of his own soul and was acquainted with the whole catalogue of sin and transgressions, of temptations and shortcomings to which frail man is ever prone. As Jacob of old he had fought with God for his own salvation, and in consequence he fully realized what a fearful battle-ground is the human heart, where the powers of light and darkness are continually waging desperate warfare, with life or death forever in the balance.

To Pastor Lans the preparation for a sermon consisted in plunging into the outer darkness, where perishing souls were languishing. Their crying need, their fearful bondage in the shackles of sin, their indifference and sloth, their open hostility to God, their mockery and unbelief, how carefully he studied these marshaled hosts of evil, how painstaking his preparation to encounter them!

Such was the singular preparation for the sermons of Thorsten Lans. No delving into the abstruse dogmas of theologians, no effort to shine as a brilliant pulpit orator. Vicariously he struggled with his God for the saving of souls, earnestly he prayed as did Jacob of old: "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

Nor did he cease to intercede with God before the light divine flooded his soul with peace and the assurance that a loving Father would reveal to him a way to reach and save these erring children, for whom his every heart throb beat with compassion and love.

Thus his sermon became a living message to one and all, which they could not evade or disregard, a message from a God, so righteous and holy that he would not brook that man sinned against him, a message, also, from a merciful Saviour, whose greatest delight it was to manifest his love and lead all wayward prodigals back to his Father's house.

When the pastor had mounted his pulpit on this particular Sunday, he read his text from the thirty-fifth chapter of the Prophet Isaiah:

"The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.

It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God.

Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees.

Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing: for in the wilderness shall water break out, and streams in the desert.

In the parched ground shall become a pool, and in the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes.

And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness: the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.

No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there.

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

Thereupon he began to preach in words full of power, thrilling, soul-stirring words that caught and held the attention to the end. His homely features seemed transfigured, and his whole person was animated by a zeal, so burning, so intense that it threatened to consume him, and from out his sunken eyes a fire shone, of rapture that was not of earth.

He spoke of the great prophet, who had painted in so glowing colors the glory of the Kingdom of God, slowly emerging from the obscure mists of prophecy into the brightness and splendor of the coming day.

This servant of the Lord had lived among an unholy people, a people that had forgotten the way of God and were straying every one his own way and were worship-

ing graven images, wrought by their own hands. But the prophet had looked away from the gloom and darkness of the present. On the distant horizon he had beheld the first faint glow of the Sun of Righteousness, heralding the coming of the day of the Son of man. His implicit faith in the coming of God's kingdom had given him strength and courage to persevere, had made it possible for him to utter these winged words that have come down to countless generations.

But now the prophecy has been fulfilled; now Christ Jesus has come! The glory of God's kingdom is no longer a faint auroral light on the distant horizon, but in the person of our glorious king, Jesus Christ, it is an ever present and enduring reality. Sin's power has been broken, the way of life has been opened, and the wilderness and the solitary places are even now blossoming as the rose.

But where is the glory of God's kingdom to be found? Where may we behold its radiance and its purity? For when you look out upon the world, you behold nothing but darkness and sin, nothing but error and iniquity, all evidencing the power still possessed by the Prince of Darkness. But if you fail to discern the splendor of God's kingdom despite the lowering gloom encompassing it, then your eyes have been blinded by the glamour of the things of this world; then you have forgotten or entirely disregarded the fact that the Saviour of the world has come and wrought redemption, full and free to all mankind.

Surely, you need to be reminded again and again of the old words of prophecy, you need to pray for opened eyes and keener vision, that you may recognize this, the greatest event in all history. Yes, we all need the in-

spiration of the prophet's words, that we may write upon our banners the inscription: *Back to Christ!*

Back to Christ to contemplate his holy life, his work of redemption, his resurrection and ascension to heaven. Back to Christ, that his Holy Spirit may dwell in our hearts.

This movement back to Christ is the crying need of the hour, the need of every human soul without exception.

Back to Christ, of whom it is written: "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," and again: "Of his fulness have all we received and grace for grace." All ye who are dissatisfied with your present state, who pine for holiness of life, can you not see that the only way for this is back to Christ?

Look unto Jesus, and you will behold in him with ever increasing clearness the perfect man, who also is the Son of God. This sight of him will tend to crush and utterly humiliate you. Your very best of faith and hope, of virtue and love, will seem so poor, so insignificant that you will be tempted to despair.

But be of good cheer! In order that the fulness of Christ may dwell in us, it is first necessary to have an overpowering sense of our own nothingness. We must put off the rags and tatters of our own self-righteousness, before we can be clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Back, then, to Christ, that you may again achieve the perfection of purity and holiness to which man was created, and which a righteous God even now demands of you.

Back to Christ, all ye, who labor and are heavy laden, who languish in the bondage of sin. Back to Christ,

with whom is redemption, and victory over sin and death.

Back to Christ, all ye, who boast of virtue and good works! What do you possess that you have not received? Why are you so proud? Bow down in humility at his feet, who humiliated himself that he might exalt those who put their trust in him.

And ye, who are called to be the leaders and the teachers of men, back to Christ! Behold how He, who was made higher than the heavens, is yet become a servant of servants! Descend from your exalted stations, if you would follow in the footsteps of Jesus and do aught in His service and that of humanity. If our blessed Saviour had not humiliated Himself even unto the death of the cross, how, then, could He have wrought salvation for you and me, for all the world; how, then, could we have ventured to approach Him in our time of need and sore distress? — — —

In like manner he continued to speak of all sorts and conditions of men, inexorably summoning the nation as a whole into the Divine Presence by his oft repeated cry, *Back to Christ!* As with Israel of old, so the history of the Swedish people stretched back through centuries of valiant achievement on their part and infinite long-suffering and grace on the part of God. Now was no time to rest on laurels long since won and faded! What booted it that pious ancestors had walked in the fear of God, if their descendants now strayed every one his own way?

The children of Israel had not escaped a just and merited punishment despite the fact that they were of the seed of Abraham. Surely, then, the people of Sweden would not be spared, unless they repented in sack-

cloth and ashes, and as a nation with one accord turned back to Christ.

The great day of visitation had come, a new Pentecostal fire was kindling throughout the nation, refreshing showers of grace and mercy were descending upon the parched land, but God, whose mercy endureth forever, was still abundantly able to multiply his gifts to those whose hearts were ready to receive them.

And in the measure that the Spirit of God lived and was active within the nation as a whole, in like measure would the words of prophecy be fulfilled upon its people. A great and wondrous time would break upon them. The Lord would visit his people, and then it would come to pass that the lame would leap as an hart, the ears of the deaf would be unstopped, the hands of the weak would be strengthened, and the tongue of the dumb would sing. — — —

Though the sermon was ended and the closing hymn sung, the people remained in their places, evidently waiting for something still to come. Presently Pastor Lans appeared from the sacristy and requested the organist to lead the congregation in singing the *Song of the Rose*. Thus it came about that Ringmor again heard this song, and coming as it did after the impassioned sermon she had listened to, the meaning of its quaint symbolism suddenly flashed through her soul. Something new and vital had sprung to life within her as a result of her church-going this day; her old self had, as it were, receded into the background, giving place to a spirit that throbbed with strangely conflicting feelings of ecstasy and sadness. — — —

After the services the colonel was introduced to the Reverend Lans.

"You are old schoolmates," explained the major, "and no doubt remember each other quite well."

But Thorsten Lans did not seem able to recall the austere old gentleman before him. He pierced Count Heine through and through with his dark, lustrous eyes, as he responded to the introduction with a bow and a handshake, but he said nothing.

Thereupon he was presented to Miss Heine, on whom he cast a quick, searching look, which suddenly changed to one of paternal tenderness, as with the glimmer of a smile he said softly: "You are not far distant from the kingdom of God, Miss Heine."

By this time the people were beginning to leave the church, and soon the grassy slope leading down to the highway was swarming with numberless groups, gradually dispersing in various directions, homeward bound.

Few words were spoken. All seemed lost in deep and solemn reflection. The impassioned words of the sermon kept ringing in their ears, as it would for many a day to come. The pastor's insistent summons, *Back to Christ!*, had brought them quaking into the presence of the Son of man, before whose penetrating eyes their inmost soul was as an open book.

Not one, but had felt the piercing power of the Saviour's stern, yet loving gaze. Not one, but had quailed at the sight of his own sinful heart. But many there were, whose hearts had been quickened and cheered by the glimpse they had caught of the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world. All these, of whatever rank or station they were, seemed impelled by a new and firm purpose to take up the battle of life and carry it onward to final completion and victory.

"He can preach, can our parson!" an old man confided

to a crony of his, as they laboriously stumped along their way home.

"He is a man of God," the other replied with conviction. — — —

"What do you think of our preacher, Heine?" asked the major, as they were nearing Tower Hall.

"Oh, I like him!" exclaimed the count fervently. "Would to God that there were more of his kind!"

Count Heine subsided into silence. He had been stirred more deeply than he wished, just then, to confess. The confident assurance in his own rectitude and honor had been sadly disturbed, and the sensation was new and strange to him.

\* \* \*

When they arrived at Tower Hall, the count was met by an imperative summons to hasten home to Birger-house. His faithful old steward had fallen sick, and the large estate was left without a guiding hand to manage it. With his usual promptness, he determined to set out for home the evening of that same day.

"I am sorry to have you leave us so soon," protested the major. "I had hoped to have the pleasure of your company for several weeks at least. But, at all events, I trust that you will not deprive us of Miss Ringmor."

"What do you say, father?" asked Ringmor wistfully. "Will you feel that I have deserted you, if I let you go home alone?"

"No, no," replied the colonel with assumed joviality, "don't think for a moment that I can't get along without you. By all means, stay as long as you please, or until you have worn out your welcome!"

And so it came about that Ringmor remained at Tower Hall as the guest of the Bruces.

Thus began what for Ringmor was to prove the most wonderful period of her life. She was permitted to accompany Mrs. Bruce on her rounds to the homes of the sick and needy, and gradually she came to learn that what the masses pined for more than anything else was the blessed gospel of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again, that those who believe in Him might attain to life eternal. This gospel, she learned, could renew the hearts of men, could fill them with the peace that passeth understanding, and as a result could even transform and glorify their bald and meager lives and make them not only bearable but full of cheer and happiness.

And then, the memorable prayer meetings in the schoolhouse—how could she ever forget them! The pastor spoke so simply, yet so convincingly, that all her fears and doubts vanished. Her inner world, so long clouded by sorrows and misgivings, began to take on a brighter aspect, the more her struggling faith asserted itself, and she was able to embrace Jesus Christ as her personal Saviour.

Every day she read and re-read the glorious prophecy of the wilderness and the desert that should blossom as a rose, and she noted how in her own desolate heart this prophecy was being fulfilled. A wondrous joy was beginning to flood her soul, a joy so rich, so deep, that the happenings in the world about her seemed mean and trivial indeed. All nature seemed as if transformed and glorified to her vision, made keen by the radiance from above, which had suddenly dispelled the gloom hovering over the past and present of her young life. Her weak hands had been strengthened, her feeble knees confirmed, and she was able to look out upon life with hopeful and courageous eyes.

Not that she did not have her dark moments of foreboding and doubt. Her relations to Uno, she felt, still hung in the balance. And what her father would think of her altered views of life filled her with uneasiness and dread. But all these things, she trusted, an all-wise God would direct as seemed best to him. Under his watchful eye she would walk as on a highway, and though counted among fools, she would not err therein.

\* \* \*

Between Ringmor and Mrs. Bruce a close intimacy and friendship soon sprung up. To the latter it seemed, indeed, that a daughter, in a very true sense of that word, had at last come to her heart and home. For as this young girl comported herself in word and action, so she could have wished that her own daughter, had she been blessed with one, should have done.

In one of her dark moments, when thoughts of the one she had loved and lost filled her heart, Ringmor confided to her elderly friend the story of her love, and how and why her engagement to Uno had been broken.

"But now the agonizing thought comes over me repeatedly," she sobbingly concluded, "that, perhaps, I did wrong to break with Uno. For if he was not all that he ought to have been, I was myself far from perfect, and I may have demanded more of him than was my right. Tell me, my kind friend, did I do wrong to thrust him away from me?"

The other had listened in silence to Ringmor's story. She had more than half suspected how things were between the lovers, therefore she was not surprised at what she had heard.

She leaned over and kissed her young friend tenderly on the brow, saying: "So far as I can see, you have

acted right and properly. We women can hardly set our demands for purity and fidelity too high, when those are concerned who would link their destinies with ours. For if we abate even a little in these our demands, not only will we make ourselves unhappy, but we will help to weaken the moral fabric of society as a whole. During these times of shifting standards in both Church and State, we women are called upon to maintain at all hazards the old standards of moral purity and fidelity."

Though Ringmor felt the truth of these words, they did not remove her disquietude, nor convince her that she had done her full duty to Uno.

At last she exclaimed: "I can't escape the thought that I have done him wrong! My heart tells me that in his heart of hearts Uno has always been faithful to me despite his reckless trifling with other women. Shall, then, these outward acts of seeming unfaithfulness weigh more with me than our mutual love and affection, dating back to the earliest years of our childhood?"

But when she spoke thus, Mrs. Bruce clasped Ringmor's hands in her own, and looking her lovingly in the eye, she replied: "Alas, human love is ever prone to be blind to the faults of loved ones, and even to compromise with truth in dealing with those faults it cannot fail to see. But nevertheless the fact remains that an unfaithful man wrongs not only the woman he professes to love, but the sacredness and honor of womanhood as a whole. Our sex must stand as a unit against unchastity and faithlessness, and must by no means condone the practice of these cardinal sins. It is high time that we awake to our duties and grave responsibilities in this regard."



## XV.

It was no easy matter for Edith to earn enough for her support by the small and uncertain income of her laundry work. But so much that was new and good and beautiful had entered her life, that she would rather fare ill and starve than take up with her old life again.

One morning she found herself without both food and work. But nothing daunted, she trusted that, before the day was done, she would have what food she needed, and as to work, the little garden about the keeper's lodge where she lived would supply her with all the work that she could do. So hunting up some old and dilapidated garden utensils in the shed, she set forth with spade and rake to improve conditions about her humble home.

And in truth, there was sad need of tidying up about the lodge. She wondered that she had not noticed it before. So she set to work with might and main. What if she should spade and rake her whole garden, and then plant and sow to her heart's content! Wouldn't it be grand to have something but weeds growing round

about her, not to mention the rich harvest of garden truck which she would garner?

What a shame to let soil so fine and fertile lie fallow! But she supposed that the same conditions obtained on the estate of Captain Hall. He had so many other things to attend to that he had allowed the land to lie waste for want of proper attention. Out upon such a man! To chatter and dance and play the fine gentleman, that was his forte, but to do an honest day's work was beyond him!

It so happened that, just as she had come to this conclusion, the gallant captain himself came dashing along the highway on his spirited charger. When he beheld Edith, he suddenly drew up, thinking to amuse himself for a while by bantering with her.

"Good morning, my fair Edith!" he cried with bold familiarity. "What possesses you to slave in this way as a common menial? Don't you know that the sun will ruin your charming complexion, and that rough work will spoil your pretty hands?"

But Edith kept steadily on with her work without vouchsafing him a word in reply, nor even as much as a glance.

"Are you out of sorts to-day, my pretty maid?" he continued. "I have heard somewhere, lately, that you are capable of flying into a rage. Don't do it, Edith; it doesn't become you a bit! A charming little morsel, like yourself, should always have a sunny smile and an open door for gentlemen who call on her."

"I will reserve my smile and open my door for whomsoever I please," she retorted with a disdainful toss of the head. "I don't care a snap for you, my fine captain, nor for any of your kind. You are all a worthless lot."

"What are you saying, girl?" the captain shouted. "A worthless lot! Your jest is poor and ill-timed, let me tell you!"

As she stood there so fresh and ruddy in the midst of the rich, black loam she had turned with her spade, she appeared the very personification of fecund Mother Nature, while in striking contrast the pale, fragile, elegant captain was a type of the over-refinement and incipient degeneracy of many a proud scion of the aristocracy.

"I was not jesting," Edith replied firmly, "I meant every word of it." Then she turned her back on him and resumed her gardening.

In a rage Captain Hall put spurs to his horse and galloped wildly away. He determined to take immediate steps to eject Edith from the keeper's lodge; he would have none about him who were so impertinent and prudish as this young spitfire.

The next day he met Baron von Stedt.

"I say, Uno!" he burst out, "that girl for whom you hired my keeper's lodge is proving a veritable nuisance to me. The sooner you find other accommodations for her, the better pleased I'll be."

"You must arrange that matter to suit yourself," replied Uno shortly, "I am done for good and all with it."

"What in the world is the matter with you?" Captain Hall exclaimed in utter bewilderment. "Are you, too, turning pietist like all the rest? By my faith, you do look as though the weight of the world was resting upon you! Surely, it can't be true, what people tell me, that Miss Ringmor has broken her engagement with you."

To this the young lieutenant did not deign to reply,

but his woebegone look was more eloquent than words. The captain more than half suspected that the rumor was true. What a scandal to have such a thing happen in their regiment! It was a direct snub, not to say insult, to the entire regimental staff. Colonel Heine must be reasoned with, and made to understand that the *esprit de corps* of the whole regiment would be lowered, if Lieutenant von Stedt was to lose his prestige as the future son-in-law of Colonel Heine.

Captain Hall clung to Uno all that day, and did not leave him until he had wormed from him the whole wretched story of the scene in the keeper's lodge, and its no less miserable sequel.

He exerted himself to put new life and courage into his despondent fellow officer. It was unthinkable that the colonel would permit the fair name and fame of an officer in his regiment to be sullied by such an unheard-of thing as a broken engagement between a brother officer and his own daughter. Uno could rest assured that the whole matter would be arranged without the notoriety of a public scandal and in a manner satisfactory to all concerned.

\* \* \*

Edith's interest in her gardening did not flag because of Captain Hall's rude interruption. While she was still hard at work, a tall, light-haired young man could be seen approaching. There was a rapped look in his eye, as though he was beholding unseen things. Edith recognized him at once as George, the shoemaker's son, upon whom the great miracle had been wrought. She could not remove her gaze from him, as she pondered on the wonderful change in his life. How strange that

he, who until recently had been a helpless invalid, should now be hale and hearty and, she confessed to herself, a rather handsome fellow.

George was quick to note her gaze; he had grown accustomed to have people stare at him as at some great curiosity. So thinking to rest a while, he crossed the road and stood leaning on the fence separating her little garden from the highway.

"A fine day, isn't it?" he exclaimed cordially, "and what glorious sunshine we are having!"

"Oh, yes, it's all very fine," she remarked, wondering at the fire and enthusiasm sparkling in his eyes.

"And now the whole earth rejoices in this blessed sunshine!" he continued. "As I have been coming through the bright beauty of this day, I have heard the grass, plants, and trees singing their songs of gladness. Tell me, do you hear any such singing in your little garden?"

She shook her head, deeming his words too childish for a man to utter, but she could not laugh at him, nor could she tear her eyes away from his face. Truly, George, the shoemaker's son, was unlike any man she had ever seen before!

Again he stood there listening in his meditative, introspective way.

"Yes, there is singing in your garden plot also," he said, breaking a long silence, "but it is only a faint echo of the songs sung by plants and flowers which once flourished there. Then an old man and his wife lived in the lodge, and the garden was an Eden, rioting with endless varieties of plants and flowers. But the old couple died, and the flowers faded away, for other people came to live in the lodge, people with hard hearts,

who trampled with heavy feet over the flower beds and ruined them, and now I can hear much wailing and weeping by unborn flowers in your little plot. Oh, why are people so negligent about surrounding themselves with the pretty flowers, why do they not have greater love of the soil? But I see and hear that things will soon be different in your garden; shrubs and flowers will spring up as if by magic, and men will stop to wonder at the change and admire it."

"How can you know all this?" she asked, continuing to gaze upon his face, but most of all to look deep into the sunshine of his dark blue eyes.

"How can I know all this?" he repeated with a bright smile. "I can hardly tell you, but, you see, I spend so much of my time among flowers every day that I am beginning to understand what they say, and even to know what they think. Therefore I know just how you will plot your little garden, and just where you will plant each shrub and flower, so that it will grow and thrive; and this also I know, that all growing things will be happy with you, for you have a heart to love them all."

But when he spoke thus, she hid her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"Oh, oh!" she sobbed, "many a fair flower would now be blossoming in my garden, had I not trampled so cruelly upon the hearts of others. Well I see now what mischief my own hard heart has brought about! It was not the wailing and weeping of unborn flowers that you heard; rather it was the cry of unborn deeds of kindness on my part. Oh, how can the sunshine lavish its brightness on such as me?"

And so she sobbed and sobbed as one who would not

be comforted. At first George tried to console her by speaking tender words of sympathy and cheer, but when these failed he said at length: "Listen, Edith! even while you weep, I can hear the angels of heaven singing songs of praise over you. Your tears are as a gentle rain preparing your heart's garden for a heavenly harvest." — — —

And so it came to pass that when his day's work was done at Birgerhouse, George would find his way to the keeper's lodge, where many an earnest consultation was held as to the proper management of Edith's garden.

\* \* \*

In spite of the greatest precautions to the contrary the rumor was gradually disseminated throughout the neighborhood that the betrothal of Uno and Ringmor had been broken. Strange as it may seem, the universal sympathy of the public was with Uno. What though it must be reluctantly conceded that he had been rather lax in his habits, and that he, as the proverbial butterfly, had fluttered from flower to flower in search of the sweets of life, was he not such an agreeable and altogether desirable personage that he was not to be judged by the commonly accepted standards of conservative moralities?

The young women were profuse in their expressions of sympathy for the dashing young lieutenant who, no doubt, was eating his heart out with grief; and the young men were unsparing in their condemnation of Ringmor. What would the world come to, if young women were to become so overly prudish? Indeed, it was greatly to be deplored that a scandal of this kind should be allowed to occur in a community so orderly as theirs!

The elderly ladies and gentlemen put their heads together and rolled this bit of scandal under their tongues as a choice morsel. Colonel Heine, they all agreed, had never commanded their full confidence or sympathy. They had long suspected that his effort to pose as a model of duty and propriety was mere stage play. His failure to support the part was now working serious mischief among the better classes of the community. And had he not brought up Ringmor to be a perfect image of his own prudish self? Under such circumstances how could she expect anything but jars and conflicts upon entering the sphere of living actualities? It was all very well for her to live according to certain antiquated standards at Birgerhouse, but it was proving quite a different matter for her to plunge into life as it really existed round about her.

To cap the climax, it was learned that Ringmor was now visiting with the Bruces of Tower Hall, who had of late shown strong leanings toward a certain fanatical preacher of unsavory notoriety in the diocese.

Wherever Uno went, he was met with expressions of sympathy and regard, which gradually wrought a change in his own feelings as to the broken engagement. There was a time when he had felt himself wholly deserving of the crushing blow, but little by little he began to share the views of those about him, and to consider himself the victim of harsh and cruel treatment on the part of Ringmor and her father.

Impelled by this feeling he one day set out to call upon Colonel Heine.

He found things sadly changed at Birgerhouse. The very rooms seemed empty and dismal without Ringmor, and the appearance of the colonel startled him. The

count had aged perceptibly during the last few weeks and now seemed frail and old beyond his years.

"Have you been sick, Uncle Heine?" asked Uno anxiously. Deep down in his heart he felt that he was the cause of the colonel's altered appearance.

"Not sick but tired," Count Heine replied, trying to pass it off with a smile. "And you must not wonder at it, for I am not so young as I was."

"Uncle, is it on my account that you are grieving?" asked the baron softly, but eager to learn the truth.

The count, however, would not admit this, and merely said by way of explanation: "I have had much to do during the illness of my steward and may have over-exerted myself. But never fear, a little rest will restore me to my wonted vigor."

Impulsively Uno stepped up to the colonel.

"Uncle!" he exclaimed, "you are grieving over me and Ringmor; it is useless for you to deny it. Come, let us return to our former footing! Send for Ringmor, and let me make my peace with her; you will never repent such a step, I swear it!"

But the count only shook his head sorrowfully, as he replied: "My dear Uno, things are not so easily adjusted as that, nor are wrongs righted by a simple turn of the hand. I can and will do nothing in this matter; for not I, but life itself, stern and inexorable as fate, has parted you and Ringmor. So long as you were children together, and like two swelling buds in life's great garden, you seemed to belong to each other, but when the buds developed and unfolded, each after its kind, the differences in your natures became more and more patent and irreconcilable."

Dark despair seized upon the young man at these

words. What were they but a confirmation of his estimate of himself, when, on the day after his encounter with Ringmor in the keeper's lodge, he had set out for Birgerhouse to learn his fate? But no! he must protest with all his might against the colonel's deductions, based as they were on insufficient ground.

"Uncle Heine," he declared, "I know positively that you and Ringmor are the only ones who judge me so harshly. No one else can see the differences that appear so irreconcilable to you; all seem to think that Ringmor and I, lovers from childhood, were destined for each other."

But Colonel Heine was not to be moved.

"What others think is immaterial to me," he replied coldly. "My sole consideration in this matter is to do what is right and most conducive to the happiness of you both. I warn you that any attempt on your part to move me will prove futile."

Convinced at last that nothing he could say or do would shake the count's determination, Uno declared hoarsely: "I will see Ringmor once more and plead with her. If she remains unmovable, I will end my miserable existence, for I cannot live without her."

"My birthday will be celebrated on the tenth," said Count Heine calmly, "Ringmor will then be at home and will, no doubt, grant you an interview" — — —

The count had spoken with outward calm, but when Uno had departed, a great fear gripped his heart. He felt now that the young man's words were no mere idle threat, but that Uno in his despair was capable of so rash an act. What should he do? Should he urge his daughter to renew her former relations with Uno? No, he would not, he could not do that! But on the other

hand, and in spite of all that had occurred, Uno was so dear to his heart, that he must and would save him.

And so the strange thing happened that the count, who had never felt the need of invoking divine help and guidance for himself, now began in his sore need and anguish to knock at the portals of that mercy seat where succor is found for pleading mortals and all their wants and woes.





## XVI.

A large company of friends and neighbors had assembled at Birgerhouse to celebrate the count's birthday. Representatives from all ranks and stations in life were there: old retired army officers, resplendent with military orders received for distinguished services; well fed country squires with aristocratic names and flabby cheeks; provincial and county officers with ruddy faces and stiff magisterial bearing; clergymen, and parish schoolmasters, dignified in appearance and speech; and to these was added a host of young people, merry youths and shy maidens with rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes, for whom the glamour of life was yet undimmed by surfeit or disappointment.

Erect and stately, the count moved about among his guests, receiving their congratulations and felicitations in a manner at once courtly and cordial. He played the part of host with his accustomed geniality; a smile here, a nod there, and a pleasant word for all alike. "His lordship's favor beams as the sun on high and low," some one whispered spitefully, not realizing how true the words were in their best and highest sense.

But despite all the colonel could do, the atmosphere of the occasion was not of the usual animation and gayety characterizing former gatherings at Birgerhouse. A noticeable air of expectancy and constraint rested upon the guests, whose eyes and attention were directed chiefly upon Ringmor, doing the honors of the day at her father's side. Her every word and gesture, the varying expressions of her mobile face, all were carefully noted and commented upon. Strange rumors were afloat about her. By this time it was pretty well established that she had broken her engagement with Lieutenant von Stedt. But a new and startling rumor was being whispered from mouth to mouth to the effect that she had been constant in her attendance at pietistic meetings while visiting the Bruces of Tower Hall, nay, persons were found who declared that they knew to a certainty that Miss Heine had turned pietist. But this news was so unbelievable and shocking that few would credit it. It could not be possible that the daughter of Count Heine would join a movement originating among the lowest and meanest classes of the common people! The venerable count would never permit such madness.

"I am surprised that Uno is not present," remarked Captain Hall to his fellow officer, Lieutenant Ling, who was also numbered among the baron's associates. "Perhaps, after all, it is true that Miss Heine has broken with him, or what do you think, Ling?"

Without replying, the lieutenant stood regarding Ringmor for some time, and there was something about her that awakened memories of his own childhood and youth. Well he remembered how full of zeal and noble aspirations he had been, how he had dreamed of his heart's ideal, a shining apparition of purity and beauty,

and how his oft experienced disillusionment had made him what he was, a confirmed and hardened bachelor.

Then waking from his reverie, he replied earnestly: "Miss Heine would, indeed, be wise, if she did break with Uno. In my opinion she is too good for him. But I doubt very much that she will be able to say him nay. If she has the good sense to do so, she will undoubtedly be the first woman to resist our gallant Uno successfully."

"So you are taking up the gage in her defense, are you?" said the captain ironically, "but let me tell you, you are quite alone in that task. Just put yourself in Uno's place, and try to imagine the awkward predicament you would be in."

But the other only smiled in a superior way, as he replied: "If I were Miss Ringmor's accepted lover, such a predicament as you allude to could never occur. I am not at all surprised that a woman of her fine parts is not content to share her lover's affections with all the pretty girls in the province. It is more to be wondered at that the engagement was not broken long ago."

Captain Hall was about to make a sharp retort, when a sudden hush fell over the assembled company. Looking up to discover the cause, he perceived that Miss Heine was being conducted by her father to the grand piano in a corner of the room. Evidently she had been requested to sing some ballad or folksong, as she had done on many a former occasion. She had a well schooled voice of remarkable depth and power, and her singing was in great demand at all the parties and receptions where she was present.

What should she sing? She asked herself the question anxiously. Never before had she found it so difficult

to answer so simple a question, but all the evening she had been subconsciously aware of the feeling of tense expectancy pervading all present, and now she suddenly realized that her selection of a song would have a peculiar significance to them, as revealing the present state of her emotional nature and of her very soul life. Very well, then, she would meet the issue squarely; she would tell them of her new found happiness. But she would tell it in a way that would do more than satisfy their morbid curiosity, she would bring home to them that a life in communion with God was great and glorious, indeed, and that a life apart from him was desolate and barren and overshadowed by death's awful gloom. Never had she realized as now that God's kingdom within the soul abounded in untold riches of peace and joy, even when one's outward existence was sorely beset by pain and sorrow. Something told her that Uno would appear this evening to learn his fate from her own lips. His happiness and hers were in the balance, and yet, alas, there was but one answer to give! A higher power than her own had laid down the eternal principles of right and justice. At this thought a wonderful calm and peace descended upon her, despite her heaviness of heart.

Before she seated herself at the piano, her gaze flew swiftly over the assembled guests. Suddenly it grew fixed and riveted, her cheeks blanched, and she swayed perceptibly. Framed in the doorway at the farther end of the room, she beheld the well-known figure of Uno. So, he had come, then, for his answer, an answer fraught with momentous consequences for them both. A moment only, her gaze rested upon him, but that moment sufficed to reveal to her the finality of their coming interview.

With startling clearness the truth was revealed to her now, that she would gladly give her life for him. But with equal clearness she realized that she would serve him best by steeling her heart against him, no matter what the pain that she would cause herself and him. Though his very heartstrings were severed, he must be made to understand that without faith and constancy life was vain and ephemeral. Through man's frivolity and thoughtlessness the immutable decrees of God had gradually become blotted and blurred. Clearly, it was her duty to uphold and vindicate the justice of these decrees with all the strength and power that was given her.

But how could she hope to make this plain to Uno? Could she allow him to blot out a life so precious to herself and God? No, a thousand times, no! God was good, God was merciful, and his love sufficed to cover a multitude of sins. The abounding fulness of God's love suddenly flooded her soul and overflowed to all the world. Surely, then, it would suffice for her and him she loved more than life itself!

Stirred to her very soul, and trembling in every limb, she seated herself at the piano. No sooner had she done this, than an exceeding peace and tranquillity filled her heart. The Son of man, the Friend of sinners such as she and Uno—how vividly she beheld His divine presence at this moment! He had gone down to death to rescue and save perishing souls for his kingdom. Her wayward lover, she herself, and all humanity, were in His loving hands.

For a while Ringmor allowed her fingers to stray over the keys in a manner new and strange to those who had often listened to her music before. A sweet and haunt-

ing melody appeared and vanished only to appear again, until her thrilling voice, vibrant with feeling, caught up the air, and pealing through the spacious halls the song was heard which had wrought a change so deep and wonderful in her own young life:

“The sweetest, the fairest of roses  
I've found. Amidst thorns it reposes.  
'Tis Jesus, my one chiefest treasure,  
Of sinners a Friend above measure.”

Borne by her splendid voice, the words of the song rang through the room, now rising jubilantly, now growing soft and mellow with infinite tenderness and pathos, sending their message—her message—to every individual present. No heart remained untouched, no eye undimmed by tears. The peerless *Song of the Rose*—who could resist its urgent appeal?

Close by his daughter's side the old count stood proud and erect, a mild light beaming from his eyes. Ringmor had won him by her song. Elderly ladies and gentlemen, who had long since fallen into the deadly routine of mere existence, were aroused as never before by the mild spring breezes wafted over the desolate winter of their lives; many a youth and maiden understood in a flash that their lives would be poor and meaningless indeed, without the possession of this beauteous Rose.

But stirred more deeply than anyone else was the young man down by the door, and for him the *Song of the Rose* was especially intended. For the first time in his life he was beginning to fathom the depths of her nature, beginning also to understand that he had offered her dross in return for the priceless treasures which were hers to give. Through the medium of the song she had, as it were, taken him by the hand and revealed to

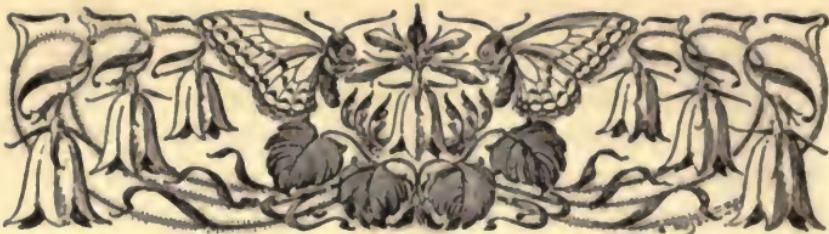
him the glories of the flower garden which is the kingdom of God, where the Red Rose blossoms. A single glimpse of the Rose was worth more than all the treasures of this world, and its possession would make life not only bearable but worth the living, even if it had to be lived without Ringmor.

When the song was ended a deep silence fell upon the assembled company. Each one was busy with his thoughts; no one ventured to express them. At last the silence, grown almost painful, was broken by the firm steps of Uno, who was seen advancing to Ringmor's side.

"Thank you, Ringmor!" His words rang out loud and clear, so as to be heard by all. "I will take my leave now, but some day I will return, when I have learned to sing the song as you have sung it to-night."

Raising her hand to his lips, he kissed it tenderly, looked for a moment into her very soul with eyes that blazed with latent fire, then he bowed ceremoniously to the count, and with head erect he strode through the throng and disappeared through the door at the farther end of the room.





## XVII.

Great and epoch-making were the changes that took place throughout the entire province. The pietistic movement, beginning as a tender shoot, grew strong and vigorous, putting forth countless buds and flowers. Not one but came under the spell of its magic influence. For or against, all were within a short time arrayed as active partisans.

It was only natural that the great change in the mode of life at Birgerhouse should come in for a great deal of comment and discussion in the community, and especially the dramatic incident, when Ringmor sang the Song of the Rose to the breathless guests at the colonel's birthday reception.

Among those who had reason to wonder at the unheard-of changes appearing on all sides was Mr. Skoglund, the steward of Mountain Oaks. The day following the birthday reception at Birgerhouse he was summoned to the office of Baron von Stedt. The steward entered with his usual blustering assurance, but a single glance at the baron was sufficient to deprive him of much of his swagger. Never before had he seen such a look of firm-

ness and determination in the countenance of his young master. And when the baron began to speak, there was a new, commanding ring in his voice.

"There is something radically wrong in the management of the estate," Baron von Stedt declared firmly. "I have spent the night in running over the accounts from beginning to end, and I found so large a deficit that for a moment I was almost ready to despair. I admit that the times are hard, but there are other estates round about us that seem to prosper although they are exposed to the same conditions as ourselves. There must be a leakage somewhere, and I am determined to find it and stop the drain."

The steward's eyes wavered, then fell before the stern gaze of the baron. But with an effort he collected himself, and adopting his old blustering tactics, he asked: "What are you now intending to do? Let me advise you to keep your hands off the management of Mountain Oaks! Present conditions are such that any experimenting on your part may prove not only dangerous but disastrous."

But the baron was not to be intimidated.

"Whether it make me or break me," he exclaimed, "I have determined to take the management of my estate into my own hands."

The steward was lost in amazement at this show of firmness on the part of his young master. From past experiences he had expected that the baron's sudden assertion of authority would prove a mere flash in the pan, to be followed by as sudden a yielding to his own superior knowledge and experience. When this failed to materialize, the steward, usually so calm and collected, was filled with dread and apprehension.

"Am I to understand that you have decided to dispense with my services?" he finally asked. "After years of drudgery on the estate, am I to be cast aside as an old glove, no longer serviceable? Fine thanks, that, I must say!"

But for once the baron was sternly inflexible.

"The estate cannot bear the double burden of us both," he declared. "That is one of the certainties revealed to me by last night's investigation. One of us must go, and let me tell you, whatever your plans may have been, I am not the one!"

As he spoke, the baron became more and more sure of himself. No abject yielding, no retrogression now! *Forward* must be his watchword henceforth—forward toward the faint glimmer of hope that beckoned him.

The steward rose uncertainly. He hesitated as if he wished to speak, but evidently thinking better of it, he crushed his hat down upon his head and stalked out of the room without a word of parting.

That afternoon the baron witnessed the passing of Mr. Skoglund as steward of Mountain Oaks. He saw an express wagon drive up to the steward's cottage and the driver disappear within. Soon he and the steward appeared carrying a heavy trunk, which they lifted into the wagon, and mounting the seat they drove out through the entrance gate for parts unknown.

The baron heaved a sigh of relief, when he saw the steward vanish from sight around a bend in the highway. His heart grew lighter, and he addressed himself with renewed courage to the heavy task before him.

\* \* \*

The garden plot surrounding the keeper's lodge of Captain Hall's estate was a perfect riot of many-colored

and gorgeous vegetation. Magnificent asters sway gently to and fro in the glorious sunshine, and stately dahlias nod their heads condescendingly to the whispering breeze, busily passing from one flowerbed to another with its gossiping secrets. Within the lodge Edith is busily occupied with her work.

The shades of evening were coming on apace, and as her iron glided smoothly over the snowy linen, her eyes glanced now and then out through the open window. Suddenly her hands fall listlessly to her side. A haunting thought, which had pursued her all day, now surges through her soul—the thought of her false and lying words to the young lady of Birgerhouse, words that had stabbed and wounded almost unto death one as pure as she was innocent of all offense against herself.

She had been on the point of going to Birgerhouse to sue for forgiveness, when she learned that Miss Heine was away from home. But now that she had returned, Edith's heart almost failed her at the thought of seeking an interview with one she had injured so grievously.

But this evening the desire was again strong upon her to right the wrong she had done. So without giving herself time for reflection, she hastily finished her work, dressed herself in her Sunday best, and set out for Birgerhouse.

\* \* \*

Ringmor was sitting in her room looking out upon the shining serenity of an early autumn evening. Nature still abounded with color, life, and fragrance, though the first melancholy signs of winter and death had already made their appearance, filling even Ringmor's

heart with sadness. For though her new found happiness had flooded her life with brightness, there were still, hidden away in her heart, dark memories of the past, which she feared that even the new light from above would never be able wholly to dissipate.

The darkest of these memories was her broken engagement, and the cause of it and all her misery, the young girl in the keeper's lodge. How well she remembered her awful words, her flashing eyes and tigerish fierceness! How was it possible for anyone to act as Edith had done? Never in her life had Ringmor encountered a person so terrible and so vindictive.

"Poor, wayward child!" she murmured. "How will it all end for you?—Poor child!"

Just as these sad thoughts were passing through her mind, a maid appeared with the information that there was a young girl out in the kitchen, who wished to speak with her. Giving orders to show the visitor in, Miss Heine stepped for a moment through the open door into the conservatory, where she endeavored to regain her composure by gently ministering to the needs of her plants and flowers.

Meanwhile Edith stood shrinking and hesitating before the door to Ringmor's room. Now that the moment had come, for which she had planned so long, she shrank from the ordeal before her. The evil powers within mustered all their strength to put her good resolutions to flight and cause her to flee from Birgerhouse with unaccomplished mission. But with a mighty effort, and with heart beating aloud, she wrenched the door open and entered the room.

Hearing the noise of the opening and closing of the door, Ringmor quickly emerged from the conservatory,

but stopped in her tracks, amazed and terrified at the sight of Edith.

Edith had remained standing just inside the door with the humble air of a beggar woman; and in her first amazement, Ringmor had no thought of asking her visitor to step forward and be seated. So great was the stillness in the room that the sooming of the wind through the poplars outside could be distinctly heard.

At last the suspense grew too great for Edith. A cry burst from her lips, and she rushed forward and grasped Ringmor's hand with an air of deep humility.

"Forgive me, oh, forgive me!" she cried despairingly. "I have lied to you, I have spoken harsh, cruel words to you, and now my heart is filled with unhappiness and remorse."

These words startled Ringmor still more, but there was a ring of sincerity in them that went straight to her heart. How unlike, she mused, was this meeting to their former encounter in the keeper's lodge!

Edith did not wait for Miss Heine to reply. The floodgates of her heart were opened, and she poured forth the whole story of her life with its intrigues and hopes, its vaulting ambitions and crushing disappointments. Then she began to tell of the new life that had been kindled in her soul, and of the peace and happiness that had come to her, dimmed only by the memory of the great wrong she had done Ringmor. Tears were streaming down her cheeks as she spoke; but before she had finished her heart grew lighter at the sight of the smile of tender sympathy and understanding beaming from the eyes of Ringmor.

When she at last lapsed into silence, Ringmor sat fondling her hand for some time with the ca-

ressing tenderness of a mother soothing her weeping child.

"Thank you for coming," she said simply. "You have lifted a load from my heart and made me exceedingly happy. Again I thank you for coming."

Then rising, they stood for a lingering moment with clasped hands, the dark Edith, pulsing with vitality, and the light, ethereal Ringmor, unconsciously aristocratic in every line and contour of her slight and girlish figure.

As if to witness their unspoken compact, the full moon beamed through the unshuttered windows, and in its light the poplars bowed and swayed in rhythmic sympathy with two young hearts that had found peace and happiness at last.

\* \* \*

To Baron von Stedt the winter that followed proved one of intense application and toil. So many and varied were the duties connected with the management of his estate that at times he almost despaired of mastering them; but, much to his surprise, he found them growing lighter and pleasanter, as the days and weeks lengthened into months of persistent effort on his part. At first his former comrades tried repeatedly to lure him back to his old life of boon companionship, but when they were as repeatedly met by his blank refusal, they gradually ceased to trouble him with their importunities.

But though the baron labored strenuously and with much success, he was far from happy. Vivid memories of his former care-free life kept recurring to him with such enticing power as to be almost irresistible. How different the life he now was leading! An endless

round of tasks and duties, broken only by nights of restless tossing upon a bed, where gloomy thoughts deprived him of the rest and sleep he craved, such was his present life. And darkest of these thoughts was that which never left him now—the loss of Ringmor and her love.

But sometimes, when his gloom was deepest, a rift would appear, through which a ray of light and hope would reach him, when he recalled his last visit to Birgerhouse, and heard again Ringmor's sweet voice singing the *Song of the Rose*. The haunting air had clung to him, and here and there the words took form and spoke their message to his soul.

Not once during all this time did he visit Birgerhouse. He was waiting, and striving while he waited, for something, he scarcely knew what, to take form and substance within him, before he ventured to present himself again to Ringmor. Formerly, he remembered, it had been the most natural thing in the world for him to mount his saddle horse and ride over to Birgerhouse; now he shrank from it as from a trying ordeal.

About this time the baron began to manifest a lively interest in the personality and welfare of his dependents. This was especially true with regard to his old coachman, Mats, the story of whose life and final winning for the cause of Christ he soon learned from the lips of Mats himself. And now that his attention was called to it, the baron could see that a great and radical change had really occurred in his faithful old servant. Even in the case of Mrs. Strand he observed with interest that the old expression of bitterness, which had stamped her features, had given place to one of sweet peace and gentle humility.

All these causes working together brought about that the young master was beginning to feel at home at Birgerhouse. Heretofore a spirit of unrest had always driven him forth again, whenever he had returned home after a protracted round of pleasures. The drudgery, the emptiness of a life he neither understood nor cared to understand, had terrified him. Now all this was changed. The smallest details of the life about him now interested him greatly. A new world was opening before him, and he was beginning to realize that every individual has his appointed place to fill and task to perform, and that he must discover these, before he can come into complete harmony with life, without which no true happiness is to be found.

But though the baron labored earnestly to better himself as well as his estate, his progress in this respect was slow indeed, so long as the shadow of his estrangement from Ringmor hung over his life.

One day in the latter part of the winter important business concerning the estate made it necessary for him to drive in to the provincial capital. As the sleighing was good, he decided to make the journey in his light cutter, taking Mats along as driver. The day was bright and crisp, and the baron enjoyed to the full the sparkling beauty of the wintry scenery. After spending the night in the city, they set out for home on the following day—a Saturday. A change in the weather had occurred, the skies were overcast, and all nature seemed bleak and dismal. At noon the first large, fleecy snowflakes began to descend, growing thicker and finer as the day advanced, until all nature was obliterated from view. Slower and more lagging grew the pace of their spirited roadster. Finally he

was plunging laboriously through the deepening drifts, and then the blackness of night swooped down upon them without warning.

"At this rate we won't reach home to-night," remarked the baron. But the only answer that Mats vouchsafed was to speak a few encouraging words to the faithfully plodding horse, as if to assure the master that between them they would see him safely through the storm to the security of home and Mountain Oaks.

But the darkness grew deeper, and the swirling snow threatened to engulf them. Suddenly the sleigh stopped. In a deep hollow of the highway a drift had been encountered through which even the stout, spirited horse was unable to make his way.

Mats stepped down into the drift and tried vainly to extricate the horse and sleigh. Then the baron came to his assistance, but with like result.

There they were, hard and fast, in a huge snowdrift, with night coming on and no prospects of further progress. As if to add to their misery, the storm increased in fury, threatening to bury them completely in its cold, white shroud.

To the baron the outlook seemed desperate indeed, but Mats was bright and cheerful as ever.

"We'll be out of this in a short time," he declared reassuringly. "Something tells me that help is near at hand."

"Something tells you! Much good will that do us!" retorted the baron testily.

"But I know it," persisted Mats, gently stroking the steaming nose of the horse, while his Master resumed his seat in the sleigh, shivering with the intense cold.

"Look!" cried Mats suddenly, "yonder is a light. We

must be near some dwelling. With your permission I will try to find shelter for the night."

Without awaiting his master's reply, Mats began to plow his way through the deepening drifts toward the beckoning light in the distance. Left to himself the baron felt an unreasoning sense of loneliness creep over him. The silence and desolation grew oppressive; the swirling snow eddied about him, and darkness, black and impenetrable, but for the distant light, enveloped him in its forbidding folds. So violent grew the storm at times that the light was blotted out, and with it every vestige of hope and courage in his heart, but the next moment his spirits rose again, as he beheld the far-off glimmer darting forth from out the encircling blackness of the night.

Strange fancies surged through his mind, as he sat there biding with what patience he could the outcome of this unpleasant predicament. The most trivial incidents of the day through which he had passed took on a new and exaggerated importance.

In his utter loneliness, despair, stark and complete, was sweeping aside the last trace of courage from his heart, when a sudden revulsion of feeling laid hold on him with overwhelming power. To his numbing senses the swaying form of Ringmor again appeared. Again he heard her vibrant voice singing:

"The sweetest, the fairest of roses  
I've found. Amidst thorns it reposes."

The sound of approaching voices aroused him from his reverie, and presently Mats, accompanied by two other men, was standing by his side. Mats reported that he had obtained lodgings for man and beast at the lone

house whose beacon light they had seen, and that the men had been sent to help them out of their present precarious situation. By their united efforts they made their way through the deepening drifts toward the beckoning light and finally entered the sheltered enclosure of the place. The jingling of the sleigh bells brought the master of the house to the door, from which his cheery words of welcome were sent booming through the pitchy darkness of the storm. Upon entering the house the baron was astonished at the commanding presence of the host. He had expected to find that Mats had secured a refuge from the storm in the abode of some friendly but uncouth peasant, but this man, he saw at once, was of a different type. The baron was on the point of asking him his name and station, but something about the man forbade any attempt at familiarity or condescension on his part.

The astonishment of the baron was increased, when he entered the house. He was conducted into a high-ceiled, spacious room, that seemed to occupy the greater part of the dwelling. To the baron the sensation was that of one entering the sacred precincts of a temple. The interior was brightly illuminated, and from the open fireplace a huge hardwood fire roared up the yawning chimney.

The first thought of the baron was that he had broken in upon some festive occasion, and he ventured to beg pardon for his unwarranted intrusion, but his host smilingly shook his head as he said: "You are my only guest. I have been waiting for you a long time."

There was a peculiar resonance to his tone, and when their eyes met, Uno felt that his host was looking into his very soul.

Uno was invited to sit down to the supper table, which, much to his surprise, was provided with an extra plate, as if a guest had been expected.

When the meal was finished, the host inquired whether his guest wished to retire at once, or if he would like to while away an hour or so in conversation.

The baron felt so refreshed and strengthened by the abundant repast, and by the cheer and comfort of his surroundings, that he at once launched into an animated conversation with his host, and soon became impressed by his shrewd and wide-awake views as to all the leading questions of the day. Before long the baron began to grow keenly conscious of his own inferiority to his man, whose piercing eyes he was finding it more and more difficult to meet. But at the same time a growing faith and confidence in the striking personality of his host was beginning to displace the feeling of constraint he had felt at their first meeting.

The conversation that followed was of momentous importance to the baron. The most secret recesses of his soul were laid bare, and almost without volition he was led to recount the chief events in his own brief life with its temptations, weaknesses, and doubts. It was such a relief to unburden his heart to one of whose sympathetic understanding he felt an intuitive certainty! But at length he reached a point in his narrative where he hesitated, faltered, and suddenly lapsed into silence. The thought of Ringmor, whom he had irretrievably lost through his own recklessness, silenced him. The expression of almost boyish frankness in his face gave place to one of studied reserve. He buried his face in his hands, and a sigh, which was almost a groan, escaped him.

"Alas for the folly of youth!" he moaned. "The sin of a fleeting moment cannot be expiated by the remorse of a lifetime. Why are we so alone in the world; why are we so heedless of the counsels of those who wish us well?"

"Never despair!" exclaimed the strange host in deep, earnest tones. "There is forgiveness for every sin, if we but lay hold on it by faith. Nothing happens by chance. Our every act has a cause and becomes in turn the seed from which future harvests of good or evil will be reaped. It is true that life seems a chaos of conflicting or aimless strivings, we know not whither nor for what, and that the more we struggle to reduce our lives to order, the more chaotic they become. Have you ever tried earnestly to make something out of your life and seemed on the point of success, only to feel the ambitious structure you had reared crumble and fall to ruin under your feet? And why? Simply because you were all-sufficient unto yourself. You were not in touch with the life about you, not in harmony with God, the author of life and its chief end and purpose. For only in communion with God and his only begotten Son, our Saviour, can our lives become harmonious, and attain to that fruition which was present in the mind of God, when He created man unto His own image."

With rapt attention Uno listened to his words. He caught a glimpse, as never before, of the meaning and purpose of life. The clouds of doubt and despair were lifted for a moment, and he could see with startling clearness the way that he must tread, if he would attain unto the fulness of life. And as his host continued to enlarge upon the deep meaning of life and its solemn obligations, he seemed to Uno to know all about his own

aimless existence, his trials and temptations, and the great sorrow which he was endeavoring to hide from all the world.

All unconscious to themselves, hour after hour had sped, while the two men were deep in conversation. The candles were guttering in their sockets, and the blaze in the open fireplace had dwindled to a feeble and spasmodic flicker. At last the conversation lagged, and the men lapsed into deep and pensive silence. Without, the driving snow beat a soft tattoo upon the windowpanes, and the wind now shrieked, now whined in ceaseless eddies about the corners of the house. Unmoved by the swirling storm without, the two men sat in the deepening gloom, each busy with his thoughts, both irresistibly drawn by invisible bonds, the one to the other. The great, wide world with its seeming contradictions and cross-purposes took on an aspect of beauty, of perfect harmony and peace, where life, untrammelled by human imperfection and error, laid hold on God, unchanging and unchangeable.

But before they parted for the night, the host opened the Bible lying before him, and read to Uno the wonderful words recorded in the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John :

“I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman.

Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” . . .

Curiously blended in Uno’s dreams that night were the Saviour’s solemn words, and the voice and aspect of the man under whose roof he had found shelter.

The next day the sun rose clear and bright, and all

nature glittered with the sparkling whiteness of its mantle of snow. Uno and Mats were early astir, and after having sallied forth on a tour of inspection they determined to set out for home forthwith.

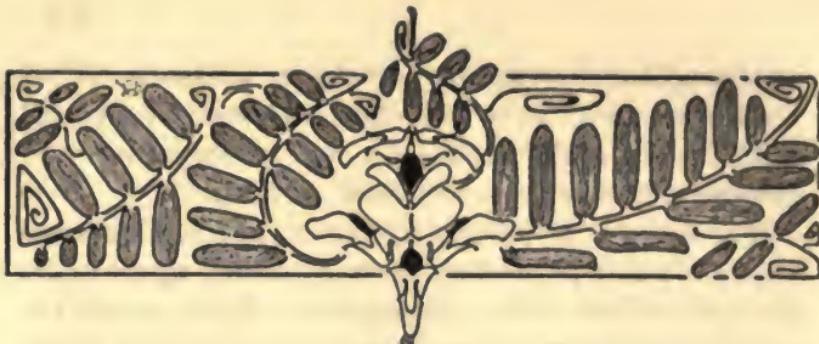
The moment of parting had come, and as Uno stood before his host to bid him farewell, he fell again under the spell of his striking personality. Again he felt the penetrating power of those deep-set eyes, and the throbbing warmth of a heart forgetful of self, and trained in the school of adversity to sympathize with the needs of all humanity.

"Farewell, and God bless you!" said the host heartily. "May the divine light from above spread its joy and brightness over your life."

Uno pressed his hand warmly, while he timidly stammered forth the request: "Will you tell me your name, so that I can send you the thanks which I now find myself powerless to express?"

With a smile of paternal tenderness the host replied: "You have spent the night at the rectory of Tower Hall parish, and my name is Thorsten Lans."





## XVIII.

The first balmy days of spring had come with genial warmth and throbbing life. Out in her little garden plot Edith is working with might and main. She still lives in the old gate lodge on Captain Hall's estate, and she has by this time won the full confidence and esteem of all her neighbors. All winter long she had been thinking of George's strange words about the wailing of unborn flowers in her garden, and now that spring had come, her first care was to prepare the ground for a plenteous sowing of flower seeds.

So preoccupied is she that she fails to notice the approach of Captain Hall along the drive leading to the gate.

"Good morning!" he calls pleasantly. "Hard at work, I see! How can you stand to be at it early and late?"

Flushed and perspiring from her labor, Edith straightens up long enough to say: "A willing heart makes labor light. What would become of us, I wonder, if we didn't have our appointed work to do?"

This was a new thought to the pleasure-loving captain, who with a sudden shifting of ground replied: "I have been thinking of late to secure the services of a competent gardener, as the grounds about the house and the entire park are in a sad state of neglect. Do you happen to know of any suitable person, whom I might engage?"

There was a flash in Edith's eyes, which she vainly tried to suppress, but no trace of eagerness could be noticed in her words: "Why not hire George Oak, apprenticed to the gardener at Birgerhouse? I hear that he has been making such rapid progress in learning his trade as fairly to astonish his master."

The captain promises to think about the matter, and then he proceeds on his way.

And so, before long, it came about that George Oak was installed as gardener on the estate of Captain Hall. It was a happy day for him. He would now be able to prove that he, who had once been a burden to others, could do a man's work and be of help to his needy parents.

Frequent, almost daily, were the meetings and consultations between Edith and George. The two young people grew to respect and admire each other, and insensibly the deeper feeling of love was kindled in their hearts.

\* \* \*

For the Baron von Stedt, also, the days of spring and early summer were crowded with work that taxed his strength to the utmost, but they were also replete with new and eventful experiences, that thrilled his soul, as never before, with the joy of living. Renewed courage and hope swelled within him, and he learned

to look upon labor not as an irksome duty, but as the boon and pleasure of life.

On a glorious afternoon shortly before Whitsunday the baron was making a tour of inspection on horseback over his estate. As he rode from field to field his spirits rose, for round about him fecund nature smiled its promise of largess, rich and abundant. Putting spurs to his horse, he soon emerged into the open highway, where he encountered Captain Hall, who was taking the air, mounted on his favorite horse.

Both reined in their horses and hailed each other with friendly greetings.

"You are the last person I expected to see!" exclaimed Captain Hall. "Things have changed wonderfully of late. Your old haunts see you no more, and I must confess that I was about to pass you as a total stranger."

"Well, that's not to be wondered at," laughed Uno lightly. Then growing suddenly serious, he continued: "I, too, must confess that I am almost a stranger to myself. You will set me down for a cad, I fear, when I tell you that I have turned over a new leaf, and am trying to live up to a new standard of life. I had come to a parting of the ways, and by the grace of God I was enabled to choose the better way. Uncertainty and doubt have yielded to a full assurance, and, strange as it may seem to you, I am even beginning to love work for its own sake."

Captain Hall stared at his friend for some time before he asked: "And what has brought about this change, if I may ask?"

"It began on the day that Ringmor sang *The Song of the Rose* and has been going on ever since. It is nothing

short of a miracle and is, as I firmly believe, the work of God's Holy Spirit."

"Many strange things are happening these days," replied Captain Hall. "You, of course, remember Edith, who lives in the keeper's lodge on my estate? Well, she is going to be married shortly."

The baron started involuntarily. The memory of Edith and his thoughtless dallying with her affections still rankled in his mind and filled his heart with shame and remorse. He shuddered to think by what a narrow margin a tragedy had been averted.

"So she is to be married," he said, "and to whom?"

"To my gardener," Captain Hall replied.

As Uno still looked mystified, his friend hastened to explain.

"You see," he said, "my park was in such a state of neglect that I simply had to get some one to set it in order, and so I engaged the services of George Oak, the shoemaker's son. He has been apprenticed to the gardener at Birgerhouse, and he has already worked wonders with my garden and park. You would hardly believe it, but his enthusiasm has so infected me that I have actually aided him in the work on more than one occasion. And the girl, Edith, is rapidly winning her way to the respect and esteem of all. She has all the laundry work that she can do; even Miss Ringmor is patronizing her."

After some further exchange of news and confidences the two friends parted. The chance meeting had furnished Uno with much food for thought. How strangely things were shaping themselves for the best without any conscious effort on his part! All the bitter old memories of youthful sin and folly were being blotted

out, and a deep sense of peace and happiness was stealing into his heart.

"When so many things have changed for the better," he mused, "then, surely, it will not prove impossible for me to win back that which I hold dearest in this world!"

Lost in deep thought he rode on, nor did he notice that his horse had turned in upon the well-known bridle path leading through the forest to Birgerhouse.

Along the winding path his horse trotted steadily, while Uno's thoughts lingered caressingly upon the woman he had loved and lost. Suddenly the horse stopped and pricked its ears, as if some unusual sight or sound had caught its attention and startled it. Thinking that he heard the sound of distant steps, Uno dismounted, and leading his horse, he set forth through the dense forest to investigate the cause of Bruno's strange behavior.

Suddenly he, too, halted. For wafted to him softly through the thick growth of pine and fir, he seemed to hear the faint echo of a song whose every tone and cadence were treasured in his heart.

His heart began to beat tumultuously. He strained his ears to catch again the well-known melody, but only the melancholy soughing of the wind through the towering forest trees could be heard. A feeling of sadness and disappointment was stealing over him, when the dearest and sweetest voice in all the world to him was borne to his ears through the Sabbath stillness of the woods, and he could catch the burden of the song:

"The sweetest, the fairest of roses  
I've found. Amidst thorns it reposes."

He listened with rapt attention, until the final words of the last stanza had been sung. Then a yearning, which he was powerless to resist, laid hold on him, and breaking through the dense undergrowth, he made his way in the direction from which the words of the song had reached him.

In the center of a small clearing Ringmor was sitting on a large granite boulder busily engaged in arranging the flowers she had plucked. So preoccupied was she that she failed to hear the sound of Uno's approach. Fearing to startle her, Uno stopped under a majestic pine at the edge of the clearing and stood for some time observing her intently. Finally Ringmor, having arranged the flowers to her satisfaction, arose to proceed on her way, when she was startled by the sight of the intruder. A lingering moment they stood facing each other, then Uno, overmastered by his feelings, darted forward and seized Ringmor's hand in his firm clasp, while from his overcharged heart there came the cry, repeated again and again: "Ringmor, Ringmor!"

With an air of utter bewilderment, and as one suddenly aroused from sleep, she gazed on him. With her disengaged hand she rubbed her eyes repeatedly, as if to convince herself that she was really awake. For the vision that she saw was the Uno of her childhood's dreams, her peerless knight above reproach, of whom she had thought that fate had cruelly deprived her.

At length, bursting from her very heart, the words sprang forth: "Thank you, Uno; thank you for coming back to me!"

So long as they lived, Uno and Ringmor remembered the hours that followed—hours spent in recounting the bitter-sweets of life's vicissitudes. Ringmor listened

with peculiar interest to Uno's account of his providential stay at the rectory of Thorsten Lans in the parish of Tower Hall. At last the waning light recalled them to a sudden realization of the passing hours. Along the familiar forest path they made their way to the entrance of the park surrounding Birgerhouse. There they parted, but not before Ringmor with a strange flutter of the heart had bidden Uno welcome to renew his old-time visits to his former home and playmate.

\* \* \*

"Wherever this Rose Tree is grounded,  
The kingdom of God there is founded,"

so run the words in one of the stanzas of *The Song of the Rose*. This promise was fulfilled both at Birgerhouse and Mountain Oaks. These two estates became the center of the religious life and social uplift in the community. Count Heine seemed to have renewed his youth, and together with Ringmor and Uno he labored early and late for the breaking of the day when the wilderness should be glad, and the desert should rejoice and blossom as a rose.

\* \* \*

At Birgerhouse wedding bells were pealing joyfully. Singularly simple and unostentatious were the arrangements for the marriage of Ringmor and Uno, and the guests were a curious mingling of persons of high and low degree, between whom, however, there seemed to exist a bond of union to be explained only by the peace and happiness that filled their hearts, and their common fellowship and communion with God.

Thorsten Lans officiated at the marriage. After the solemn vows had been taken and the benediction pro-

nounced, the happy groom led his radiant bride over to the piano. Soon, rising and swelling through the spacious halls of Birgerhouse were heard the inimitable words and melody of *The Song of the Rose*. Fresh, young voices sang it jubilantly. Elderly men and women quavered it feelingly. With one accord all joined in singing:

"The sweetest, the fairest of roses  
I've found. Amidst thorns it reposes.  
'Tis Jesus, my one chiefest treasure,  
Of sinners a Friend above measure."













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